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Antropofagia and Constructive Universalism: A Diptych

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Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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ANTROPOFAGIA AND CONSTRUCTIVE UNIVERSALISM: A DIPTYCH
(ANTROPOFAGIA AND CONSTRUCTIVE UNIVERSALISM: A DIPTYCH)

Monograph

by

Aarnoud Rommens

Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

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entitled:

Antropofagia and Constructive Universalism: A Diptych

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This study proposes a rethinking of the word-image relation through an examination of Joaquín Torres-García's Constructive Universalism (1934-1949) and the Brazilian Modernist movement of Antropofagia (1928-1934). By placing both in the close relation of a 'diptych,' I argue for a new reading of Torres-García's visual work as well as a different understanding of Antropofagia.

In the first part of this work, I argue, through a close reading and viewing of Torres-García's work, that the constitutive instability between word/image has been overlooked in favour of, on the one hand, an appropriation in terms of a 'deviation' from the canon of Geometric Abstraction and on the other hand as a paradigm of Pre-Columbian, Inca abstraction. Both discursive gestures repress the matter of visual *aesthesis*. Against this strategy of legibility, I propose a counter-reading through the concepts of 'graphism' (Leroi-Gourhan), 'manuscript' (Sarabia), the 'sensory field' (Lyotard) and the hypericon. These concepts allow contingency to find its way back into Torres-García's oeuvre in opposition to neo-Classicist misappropriations. Throughout my argument, it will become evident that Torres-García's paintings bespeak an irrepressible *mestizaje*, an intertwining of the figural with the abstract. It is this tension animating Torres-García's work that has been neglected by the disciplining of discourse's 'logic of illustration.'

In the second part of the study, I take Antropofagia not so much as a historically determinate period in the narrative of Brazilian Modernism, but as a heuristic for the thinking through of the 'inconstancy' of the relation between word and image in its New World Baroque vertigo. This vertigo is politically charged, and amounts to a 'counter-Conquest' (Lezama Lima) of the clear and distinct distribution of legibility and visibility inherited through coloniality. The metaphoric economy of cannibalism in Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago" (1928) in conjunction with the visual work of Tarsila do Amaral and the 're-discovery' of Barroco Mineiro by the Brazilian avant-garde deconstructs the narrative of rupture so as to engage in a complex 'route to roots'

highlighting the artifice of origin. This same artifice marks Torres-García's oeuvre, and by 'closing' the diptych, I show how abstraction folds back into a Baroque superimposition.

Keywords

Torres-García, Joaquín; Abstract Art; Andrade, Oswald de; Lyotard, Jean-François; Baroque; Latin America; Varejão, Adriana; Aesthetics; Word and Image; Inca; Rancière, Jacques; Leroi-Gourhan, André; Benjamin, Walter; Adorno, Theodor W.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervising duo, Allan Pero and Cody Barteet. Many thanks to Cody who took on this project at such short notice. My gratitude also goes out to John Hatch, Anthony Purdy, Michael Gardiner, Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu, and Verónica Schild for stimulating discussions and allowing me the time to learn. Special thanks to Jan Baetens, who, although I am no longer his student, has been instrumental in my thinking. Kane Faucher, Andrés Villar and Eduard Arriaga – thank you.

My father, Dirk, and mother, Marijke, for their continued belief and support even when the chips were down. To Wout Boussen and Bert Ketelaars, for their patience and understanding.

To Jonah: who inspires me, always. To Nessie: I dedicate this work to you.

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General Introduction: Antropofagia and Constructive Universalism: A Diptych of Legibilities and Visibilities

This work is concerned with the relation between word and image, with the routes between the visible and the articulable, with the flows of the diptych. The term diptych already indicates the starting point of this work: the constitutive entanglement of visibility and legibility.¹ It is the guiding metaphor for the intertwining of legibility and visibility that allows access to a thinking of the word in relation to the image (and vice versa), and how reading is always also a viewing, and how the “thickness” (Lyotard 2011, 90-114) of the visual field is always embedded in literacy. I will consider visual works of art – in this particular case the art of Joaquin Torres-García and that of the Brazilian antropofagia movement – as complex interfaces of seeing, speaking and reading. The overall aim of this study is to develop a diagrammatological heuristic that takes the image in its particularity, as a material that poses its own demands to thought and can therefore not be subsumed under the discursive economy of the ‘example.’ That being said, I equally intend to make palpable, through readings that take on the thickness of the sensory field, how legibility frames what the eye can see: the image is always a double-take passing through circuits of visibility and legibility. A diagrammatical approach that does justice to the particularity of the image must also take heed of its contradictory routes in discourse. This (precarious) methodology will find a more or less definite articulation in the term ‘emblematics,’ which I propose as a reading/viewing stance that engages critically with the notion of exemplification.²

¹ The etymology of the word *diptych* thematizes legibility, as it derives from the Greek *diptukha*, ‘pair of writing tablets.’ It is of course also the designation of a Western (religious) pictorial tradition, and as such invokes a complex pictorial-scriptural economy. The term ‘diptych’ will return in Chapter 7 (7.2.2), where I will discuss Adriana Varejão’s painting *Proposal for a Catechesis; Part I, Diptych: Death and Dismemberment* (1993; Figure 7.2).

² However, it is important to stress that the example and emblematics are not binaries but stand in a relation of complementary tension. Emblematics is a name for a heuristic, of an interpretive stance that brings out the interrelation between viewing and reading which resists the ‘dilution’ of the opacity of the visual, i.e., its subsumption within the epistemological claims of the logical field of the main text.

This introduction will develop in more detail some of the theoretical implications of the arguments of the main text, and focus on a cluster of notions that have gained currency in contemporary theoretical debates on aesthetics and politics.

Regimes of Legibility/Visibility

One word is enough to light up an image; one image can refashion a discourse. This, I believe, sums up Jacques Rancière's view on the image as the bivalent ('diptych') space of legibility and visibility – a view this work shares. As he writes,

To see something as art, be it a *Deposition from the Cross* or a *White Square on White Background*, means seeing two things in it at once. Seeing two things at once is not a matter of trompe-l'oeil or special effects. It is a question of the relations between the surface of exhibition of forms and the surface of inscription of words (Rancière 2007, 19).

The stabilized and generalized “articulation between words and visual forms” (ibid., 2007, 69) constitutes in Rancière's understanding a historically determinate “artistic regime” (2004, 20). He distinguishes three epochal structures of visibility/legibility, and distributes them in a general chronological schema. The first, i.e., the “ethical regime of images,” in which “‘art’ is not identified as such but is subsumed under the question of images” (ibid.) is predicated on “knowing in what way images' mode of being affects the ethos, the mode of being of individuals and communities” (ibid., 21). The poetic/representative regime of the arts that superseded the previous regime “identifies the substance of art - or rather of the arts - in the couple *poiesis/mimesis*” (ibid.). However, mimesis does not refer to imitation, but to a specific configuration of visibility and intelligibility (Rancière 2007, 73). Mimesis is a determinate way of making things visible, of having them enter the scene of visibility and make them recognizable. This presupposes the ground of discourses and meaningful practices - “ways of making, modes of speech, forms of visibility, and protocols of intelligibility” (ibid.) - against which the image can appear in the field of vision and become intelligible.

[M]imesis is not resemblance but a certain regime of resemblance. Mimesis is not an external constraint that weighed on the arts and imprisoned them in resemblance. It is the fold in the order of ways of making and social occupations that rendered them visible and thinkable, the disjunction that made them exist as such (ibid., 73).

The contemporary aesthetic regime “is the regime that strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres” (2004, 22). Furthermore, the “aesthetic regime of the arts did not begin with decisions to initiate an artistic rupture. It began with decisions to reinterpret what makes art or what art makes ... [It] is first of all a new regime for relating to the past” (ibid., 25).

It is in the shift from the representative to the aesthetic regime that art uncovered its political core, which Rancière frames in terms of the “distribution of the sensible,” “a polemical distribution of modes of being and ‘occupations’ in a space of possibilities” (2004, 42). In fact, the aesthetic regime “call[s] into question mimetic division in favour of an immanence of thought in sensible matter” as well as revealing “the distribution of occupations that upholds the apportionment of domains of activity” (ibid., 43). Rancière reminds us that aesthetics is where politics takes place, immanently, in its engagement with the distribution of the sensible (and the possibility of its redistributions), since art

reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed ... it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language (ibid., 12-13).

Politics is a matter of aesthesis in that it involves a break in the perceptible, in the regime of visibility and intelligibility, in that the disavowed, marginalized - “the part of those who have no part” (Rancière 1999, 38) - suddenly become visible, interrupting the visible-legible continuum. Politics, as the radical engagement with democracy, becomes only a real possibility through the power of disclosure of the aesthetic (cf. Deranty 2010, 120). The advent of democracy and the aesthetic regime are indissociable, leading, in the realm of the arts, to a general deconstruction of the partitioning of labour, genres, materials, and practices, as intimated in the revival of the genre painting.

The destruction of the representative regime in painting started at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the revocation of the hierarchy of genres, with the rehabilitation of 'genre painting,' the representation of ordinary people engaged in ordinary activities, which used to be contrasted with the dignity of history painting as comedy to tragedy (Rancière 2007, 78).

Romanticism and Realism in particular began the movement of making the previously invisible - experiences and themes disallowed from hierarchical tabulations of the higher (academic) arts - enter the perceptual field, thereby effecting a disordering of representation, which led to the inauguration of an “expressive” paradigm (cf. Ross 2010, 156).³ Modern aesthetics comprises a regime unified in “dis-measure or chaos that now gives art its power” (Rancière 2007, 45), giving shape to “a great chaotic juxtaposition, a great indifferent melange of significations and materialities” (ibid., 43) - the “great parataxis” (ibid.) of modern art. This shift impacted on the relation of power between word and image, since, with the ascension of the aesthetic regime,

Words no longer prescribe, as story or doctrine, what images should be. They make themselves images so as to shift the figures of the painting, to construct this surface of conversion, this surface of forms-signs which is the real medium of painting - a medium that is not identified with the propriety of any support or any material (ibid., 87).

Unlike their function within the representational regime, words no longer act as “anchors” (Barthes 1977, 38ff) that fix meaning in place. Words no longer subsume the image within the regulated circuit of signification ensured by the taxonomy of representational visibility/legibility.

However, Rancière’s aesthetic theory articulates an aporia between the generality of historicity - with the categorical understanding of aesthetics as epochal structure - and the claim that aesthetics does justice to the “immanence of thought in sensible matter” (2004, 43), to thought’s contingent ‘encapsulation’ in a specific artwork. The relation between the particularity of the work of art - its affective *haecceity*⁴ as “sensible matter” -

³ Toni Ross, “Image, Montage,” in Deranty 2010, 151-68.

⁴ In *What is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guattari associate haecceity with the event - as that which eludes definition - but which the concept, in its immanent heterogeneity with itself, obliquely thematizes. “The concept speaks the event, not the essence or the thing - pure Event, a haecceity, an entity: the event of the

and the rhetorical function of ‘unveiling’ its own truth - that it partakes in a possible democratic redistribution of the sensible, by virtue of its ‘belonging’ to the ‘aesthetic regime’ - is left under-theorized. What Rancière does not elucidate is how art ‘acts’ politically, how, as “‘regimes’ or paradigms of art ... which provide collective conditions of possibility for individual practices” (Ross 2010, 153), the ‘individuality’ of the work effects an intervention in the political field from its sensory ‘immanence.’ Although Rancière is right in stressing that the image is a conceptual surface as much as it is a visual presence, he downplays the irruptive energy of the image and tends to quiet its enigmatic ‘muteness’ through the discipline of his historicizing discourse, as if the latter is the guarantee of its political efficacy. The reduction of the work to the word, as a function of legibility, is especially telling in his critique of Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Francis Bacon’s painting in the *Logic of Sensation* (2003).

Rancière is entirely justified in pointing out that Deleuze’s ‘blocs of sensation,’ which the phenomenological eye equates with a primordial, a-semiotic, ‘brute’ sensate body prior to signification, is itself the product of a legibility. If there is such a thing as a ‘naked,’ unmediated, ‘pure’ visibility, it only exists as a rhetorical effect.

The phenomenological tradition and Deleuzian philosophy readily assign art the task of creating presence under representation. But presence is not the nakedness of the pictorial thing as opposed to the significations of representation. Presence and representation are two regimes of the plaiting of words and forms. The regime of visibility of the ‘immediacies’ of presence is still configured through the mediation of words (Rancière 2007, 79).

Deleuze’s viewing is made possible by a specific ‘aesthetic education,’ a determinate alignment of the legible and what it can capture with the eye. Writing produces a certain image of the gaze, creating texts that weave blind spots into their fabric. Seeing equally concerns the space of an invisibility co-created by a certain metaphoric economy, of

Other” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 21). Otherness seems incompatible with Rancière’s tabulation of epochal art structures: the aesthetic regime accommodates all ‘chaos’ beforehand, since it is part of its definition.

verbal images creating a continuum with what the eye ‘intends’ to find, while ‘trying’ not to see what might upset the rhetorical framing. As Rancière continues,

what Deleuze, in order to preserve the idea of painting as a labour of sensation on sensation, tries not to see - the pictorial diagram only makes visible if its labour is rendered equivalent to that of metaphor, if words construct such equivalence (Rancière 2007, 82).

It is this constitutive intertwining of visibility and legibility, and the equivalences and interruptions between the two that are the main concerns of my inquiry. However, where I depart from Rancière is his unequivocal reading of what ‘art’ – and the aesthetic for that matter – *is*. For Rancière, art is a matter of definition, and by that token he does not take into account the overdetermination and ‘routings’ of words such as ‘history,’ ‘aesthetics,’ and ‘art,’ which bear their own history of legibility and visibility (not to mention their metaphysical ‘detritus’ as they have circulated and still do so in other philosophical discourses). Although Rancière speaks of the aesthetic as the “immanence of thought in sensible matter” (2004, 43), this observation does not go any further than a general observation. Since the aesthetic must function as epochal concept, Rancière operates a static image of the ‘immanence’ of the work of art, in that its de-structuration is already structurally accounted for by the historical framework. Since the aesthetic regime is marked by chaos and a generalized upheaval of representational strategies, individual art works respond with ‘melange,’ ‘montage,’ ‘parataxis,’ ‘chaos,’ etc. Yet, this amounts to little more than further anchor the ‘immanence’ of the aesthetic in an overall logic that makes art circulate in a restricted hermeneutic economy – an austere distribution of the sensible. Consequently, the concept ‘aesthetics’ becomes tautological: it functions both as *explanans* and *explanandum*; there is nothing art can ‘do’ but exemplify a historical analysis. In his devastating critique of Rancière’s art theory, Martin McQuillan⁵ points out that it merely busies itself with “universalizing descriptions of artistic epochs rather than the detailed consideration of textual examples that might suggest, explain or challenge a more general theory” (McQuillan 2011, 165). The unproductive ambivalence of the ‘aesthetic’ in ‘aesthetic regime’ – as simultaneously a name that attempts to

⁵ Martin McQuillan, “Paul de Man and Art History I: Modernity, Aesthetics and Community in Jacques Rancière,” in Bowman and Stamp 2011, 163-184.

thematize the immanence of the artwork as well as transcending this immanence in its desire to capture historical essences – is foregrounded by the trans-historical potentiality accorded to the three regimes. Indeed, they are said to constitute three “different regimes [that] can also coexist in the same historical period” (Deranty 2010, 119). Furthermore,

the impression that Rancière’s ‘regimes’ are too broad dissolves once we differentiate between two levels of analysis. The categories of the ethical, the representative and the aesthetic, which name the three main regimes of the arts, are not strictly speaking historical categories. They are in fact what we could call meta-historical categories. ... While different paradigms of Western art may predominate during particular historical periods, they may also recur historically or operate in combination within individual practices (Ross 2010, 155).

I take this anxiety with upholding the historical integrity of the frame, while also simulating trans-historical flexibility⁶ as indexical for the realization that the aesthetic might disrupt the frame from within. That is to say, to take seriously the “immanence of thought in sensible matter” (Rancière 2004, 43) might very well disrupt the tripartite, regimental architecture. It is not that Rancière’s regimes are too broad, but that the contradiction within the ‘aesthetic’ – immanent disruption and a category accommodating disruption – might topple the notion of an ‘age.’ As Gilles Deleuze discerned in his reading of Michel Foucault’s work,

An ‘age’ does not pre-exist the statements which express it, nor the visibilities which fill it. These are the two essential aspects: on the one hand each stratum or historical formation implies a distribution of the visible and the articulable which acts upon itself; on the other, from one stratum to the next there is a variation in the distribution, because the visibility itself changes in style, while the statements themselves change their system (Deleuze 1988, 48).

It becomes clear why Rancière rarely performs a close reading/viewing of individual works, but mostly enlists proper names or summary accounts of artworks that are adduced to ‘people’ his system.⁷ If, as Toni Ross notes, “Deleuze’s privileging of

⁶ Does the system permit one to read Archaic Greek art ‘aesthetically’? Or must the permutations of the ethical, poetic and aesthetic obey the laws of chronology?

⁷ Balzac, Flaubert, Mallarmé, Gauguin, Chardin (cf. Rancière 2007) are made continuous with the historical avant-garde - Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars, Boccioni, Schwitters, Varese (cf. Rancière 2007, 44-45) - as well as contemporary artists such as Bill Viola (cf. *ibid.*, 64) or the collective Urban Encampment (cf. Rancière 2007). As McQuillan notes, Rancière’s “literary and artistic objects seem to be drawn from a fairly narrow range with a number of notable favourites (such as *Madame Bovary*, Plato’s commentary on

painterly presence depends on his discursive eloquence,” (2010, 160), then rhetoric must also be considered a factor in Rancière’s textual operation. “Linguistic tropes change the status of the pictorial elements” (Rancière 2007, 81), he declares. It seems that Rancière’s refusal tend to the visibility of the work of art, to the textual fabric of literature, or the insistent materiality of any other art form for that matter, is informed by the anxiety not to have the ‘pictorial element’ interfere with his ‘linguistic tropes.’

Rancière’s tropology follows the logic of the example, which safeguards the integrity of his system in that the work of art is readily subsumable as an instantiation of the truth his discourse has reserved for itself. His narrative is constructed through a de-historicized, synoptic point of view that has extricated itself from the material it is supposed to work with, that is, the aesthetic and the vicissitudes of history. The position of enunciation that allows for the discernment of the aesthetic regime is impervious to the regime it discusses. This constitutes a fundamental, disavowed discontinuity between legibility and visibility at the core of the theory. As such, the theory does not take to heart its dynamizing insight into the constitutive relation and caesuras between legibility and visibility. The discontinuity between the articulable and the visible might offer the liberating potential for dislodging the stern, representative/poetic distribution of the legible and visible that informs Rancière’s historicizing discourse. A receptivity to its intrinsic contradictions would make the theory true to its word (and image) in reflecting on the chaos and disorder it sees as symptomatic of the aesthetic regime. Of course, it would also de-structure the entire conceptual architectonic. As it stands, the fate of the image is sealed: it must perpetually serve as illustration of a historical “discourse on art in the absence of the challenge of art” (McQuillan 2011, 165).

theatre and Godard’s *Histoires du Cinéma*, for example) being put to use again and again to demonstrate the truth of his philosophical discourse” (2011, 165). The artistic objects are not read as ‘aesthetic’ in their own right, but merely as *examples* of the aesthetic, constituting a readymade rhetorical repertoire, a mnemonic device. Moreover, one could ask oneself some very simple questions: Are there artists who do not exemplify the “aesthetic regime”? Would we be able to ‘read’ their works with Rancière’s conceptual apparatus - would we be even able to ‘see’ them, given the current distribution of the sensible associated with the aesthetic regime? In other words, can one *resist* the aesthetic regime? And if so, would this not effect an entirely new understanding of what it means for something to count as ‘legible’?

The Sensory Field of Spirit, Purity, and Impurity

As mentioned above, this study takes as its focal point visual art in relation to discourse - the ‘diptychal’ relation - but also pays some attention to novels and architecture, though the latter will be folded into a discussion of its pictorial-rhetorical appropriation. My method of reading and viewing is the inverse of Rancière’s. I start from the work of art and engage its immanent demand, in an attempt to think through the challenge it poses to the regime of legibility I happen to ‘see’ in it. Although the logic of the example is unavoidable (language, after all, is socially inflected, and has its generality built in it), I hope this work will evince a self-critical attitude to the weight of its words and testify to the resistance posed by the singularity of the drawings, paintings, and texts it speaks of. To do so I will retain Rancière’s insistence on the interlacing of the legible and the visible, but I will take the side of the artwork, as it were. Citing Gilles Deleuze’s study *Foucault*, Gavin Kendall,⁸ underscores that “the sayable and the visible are divided from each other, yet insinuate themselves inside the relation between the other and its conditions. The sayable offers the visible in a ‘space of dissemination,’ while offering itself up as a ‘form of exteriority’” (2011, 70). It is this space in-between, partaking of both the visible and the articulable, that this inquiry sets out to explore - it is its *ethos*.

Discarding the historical classification in terms of an “ethical,” a “poetic/representational” and a contemporary “aesthetic regime” rooted in modernity, I opt for the notion of ‘regime of legibility and visibility,’ while employing the term ‘aesthesis’ or aesthetics gleaned from my reading of Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* (1997). Simply put, I see the ‘aesthetic’ as a trans-historical “trait,” an “operative function” (Deleuze 1993, 3)⁹ that thematizes the disjunctions and conjunctions between word, image, speech, and writing. Adorno’s aesthetic theory is primarily concerned with the

⁸ Cf. Gavin Kendall, “Foucauldian Approaches to the Self,” in Elliott 2011, 67-82.

⁹ Although Gilles Deleuze here characterizes the baroque, which has its own historical specificity, this historicity is precisely what the (neo)baroque and neobaroque, in their confounding of regimes of visibility and legibility will question. The baroque’s operative function is to make historical categorizations diffuse. I will explore this more fully in Chapter 5. I see this as essential to the work of aesthesis: the indeterminacy of the aesthetic demands thought to give it determinacy, but this determinacy is mutable, historically variable. It is this sense of profound variability that I believe is missing in Jacques Rancière work on art.

sensible appearing of the work of art, in its particularity and contingency. This appearance however, in its affective insistence, is indissociable from thought and the work of conceptuality: the artwork is what occurs in this dialectic movement. The work is never just brute materiality: it is always-already mediated through the energy of thought, which has to think the advent of a-semiosis, of an alterity that suddenly appears before the eye and that must find determination. The work must be reckoned with to be art. This ‘reckoning’ is the spirit of the work. It is what happens in the interval between the visible and the sayable: it is the hesitation before the utterance of the word that will speak the image, but can only speak it partially, since we keep coming back to it (cf. Adorno 1997, 86-87). The legibility transferred onto the work of art dissolves in it, to partake of its materiality: “all discursive ingredients are material like colors and tones” (ibid., 87). The relation between the visible and legible is unstable, dynamic, and continuously demands intellectual vigilance. If not, the work ceases to be art, its spirit shrivels and it disappears, unless it is revived (ibid. 90). Adorno’s notion of the spirit of the work shows affinities with Jean-François Lyotard’s notion of the “figural” (2011, 20ff), in that it addresses the complex interrelation between the visual and the verbal, their constitutive imbrication. Lyotard’s ‘figural’ names the space of the eye within discourse, which endows it with an irreducible figural-visual thickness, composing itself into a “sensory field” (cf. Lyotard 2011, 36). From the other side so to speak, the visual is ‘weighted down’ by the material opacity of words and legibilities, saturating the eye with memories, words, and speech, and making the world appear as meaningful. Brute visuality is but a fantasy, as is a mediation that is completely closed in on itself.

The first part of this work (i.e., Chapters 1, 2 and 3) demonstrate how the notion of ‘spirit’ of the Uruguayan visual artist Joaquín Torres-García’s is the reification, through his “rhetoric of purity” (Cheetham 1991) of the Adornian ‘spirit of the work of art.’ Torres-García, who lived and worked most of his life in Europe, and who had actively participated in the Parisian avant-garde in the twenties and thirties, returns, armed with a newly founded artistic theory he dubbed ‘constructive universalism,’ to his native Montevideo where he hoped to begin a new tradition of art, a tradition that would be truly South American. His doctrine did not take root, however, at least not during his lifetime. His theory was predicated on the salvaging of the pre-Columbian forms of art - the Inca

and pre-Inca in particular, which he discovered in the Parisian ethnographic museum, the Trocadéro - which he saw as the instantiations of a lost, abstract tradition that had been 'debased' through the adoption of figurative canons of representation attendant on colonialism. This paradigm, which, following the work of César Paternosto (1996, 2001) I will dub 'tectonic,' imagines pre-Columbian abstraction as the pure origin, which constructive universalism inflects with abstract art's 'rhetoric of purity,' and the art theory of Piet Mondriaan and Theo Van Doesburg in particular. Mark Cheetham summarizes the ideology of purity as a stance that "depends on a transcendental absolute that denies art's materiality" (Cheetham 1991, 119). It is this denial that is at work in Torres-García's words, but which, as I will elucidate in Chapters 2 and 3 in particular, is under incessant deconstruction by the 'sensory field' of the images. Chapter 2 singles out three specific tactics of the visual field that destructure the discourse of constructive universalism, namely graphism, manuscript and hypericonicity. These are the three ways in which the materiality of visibility and legibility, the opacity of visual-verbal textures, contradict the claims of Torres-García's discourse. Graphism explores the 'pointing' of the work of art outside its autonomous surface so as to upset the classical tabulation of pictograms according to the classicist cosmology of *grafismo*. Manuscript names the 'risk of the hand' (cf. Focillon) in the moment of writing/drawing that resists clear signification, while hypericonicity addresses the inherent tendency of images to seek out affinities and associations with other images, in an endless chain that negates the discreteness of the symbol constructive universalism is so invested in.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, there is the 'rhetoric of impurity.' This is the focus of the second part of this study. Antropofagia, the avant-garde movement in Brazil (based in São Paulo) at the end of the twenties, evinces an unabashed 'ecstasy of plagiarism.' I will read the latter as the expression of a neobaroque sensibility that prefigures its theoretical codification in the work of Severo Sarduy, Alejo Carpentier and José Lezama Lima. Chapter 5 explores the radical, yet enigmatic turn of an avant-garde movement to the colonial past, i.e., its salvaging of the colonial Brazilian baroque art and architecture of the once prosperous mining towns in the province of Minas Gerais (the Barroco Mineiro). Memory will appear as the device of artifice, as a de-natured tropology

that allows antropofagia to fold itself within a history of subversion, of ‘counterconquest’ as Lezama Lima calls it (2005), so as to construct its own polemical, anti-colonial stance. I will show that antropofagia operates an architecture of memory, mirrored in its reclamation of Minas Gerais baroque, by excavating its ‘spirit’ (cf. Adorno). This tactic does not amount to the appropriation of the visible (considered as the ‘style,’ recognizable pictorial idioms, motifs, etc.). Rather, it is in the aesthetic confrontation between the appearance of the works and the demand for their thinking that antropofagia, together with the Barroco Mineiro as what constitutes the Brazilian substance, is born. It is in the claiming of the baroque as a national essence that an ideological territorialization enters the centrifugal logic of antropofagia. In Chapters 5 and 6, I will examine the complex interplay of rebellion and ideology, the latter assuming the form of a nationalism that seems incompatible with the uncompromising irreverence of antropofagia as the devourer of traditions so as to reinvent them through dislocation. In chapter 6, I will recount the birth of the figure of the cannibal, a colonial figure reclaimed by antropofagia so it could cast a distorted, parodic mirror image back to the hegemonic centre. I will close with a reading of Oswald de Andrade’s “Manifesto Antropófago” (1928) through the painting of contemporary Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão, whose work replays the birth scenes of the cannibal and the baroque.

Regime, Coloniality, *Mestizaje*

Throughout this study, I retain Rancière’s notion of ‘regime,’ mostly because it has connotations that invoke the work of power and coloniality, and how these relate to textual and visual practices. Most importantly, ‘regime’ should be taken to refer to visual and verbal *literacy* and how literacies clash, overlap, and transfer legibilities/visibilities from one structural node to another (e.g., the two-way colonial transfers between centres and peripheries). I see a regime as a point of relative stability, a conjunction in legibility and visibility, a continuum with variations making discernibility possible, while at the same time containing moments of deconstruction, of indiscernibility.

I borrow the notion of coloniality from Walter Mignolo (through his interpretation of Anibal Quijano's concept of the "coloniality of power"),¹⁰ as a way to invoke the intertwining of coloniality and modernity. In Mignolo's formulation,

The coexistence and the intersection of both modern colonialisms and colonial modernities (and, obviously, the multiplication of local histories taking the place occupied by world or universal history), from the perspective of people and local histories that have to confront modern colonialism, is what I understand here as 'coloniality,' quite simply, the reverse and unavoidable side of 'modernity'—its darker side, like the part of the moon we do not see when we observe it from earth (Mignolo 2000, 22).

In short, modernity and coloniality form a 'constellation' (cf. below). Note that for Mignolo, modernity is not confined to the emergence of the Industrial Revolution and the consolidation of the nation state. Rather, it begins in the late Renaissance (early modern period) through the dispersal of worlds occasioned by colonialism and the progressive shift of Christian cosmology toward an in principle non-centred cartographic imagination. Coloniality revolves around visibility and legibility, and is a space where the distribution and redistribution of the sensible and the disjunction of legibility/visibility achieves a point of maximum intensity.

I will start my investigation with both versions of Torres-García's *Inverted Map*, which will serve as a leitmotiv throughout the first part of this study. The map gives body to the superposition of the cosmological and the cartographic, and charts coloniality as the tension between multiple, contradictory legibilities and visibilities. I will make the image legible as a hybrid hyperspace that overlays Inca cosmology with modern cartography, into a cosmic cartography, a map of the cosmic. However, this *mestizaje* is what Torres-García represses, given his investment in the rhetoric of purity, which makes him blind to the profoundly critical implications of his own work.

Incidentally, I approach *mestizaje* as a metaphor that thematizes moments of indiscernibility where the visible and the legible are at odds and tip over into a-semiosis. The 'distribution of the sensible' becomes underdetermined, and the 'proper' zones of the

¹⁰ Cf. Quijano 2000, 533-580.

visible and legible become ‘shady’ through superimpositions and involuntary visual-verbal associations. It is where the notion of distribution itself becomes precarious, marking off a zone of instability where the precise codes with which to decipher what is said and seen are opened up, ushering in new sensorial possibilities: a space of utopia. However, since, following Paul Ricoeur (1988), utopia is always already implicated with ideology, a-semiosis will assume a definite shape in new scenarios of meaningfulness. It is the racist undertone of the word ‘mestizaje’ that I mobilize to invoke its nefarious ideological side. This will turn out to be of paramount importance in the context of my discussion, in Chapter 3 in particular, of Torres-García’s rhetoric of purity, which contrasts the twilight he perceives in figuration and naturalism - invariably discursivized as an illegitimate ‘bastard mixture,’ a ‘decadent deviation’ - against the light of absolute purity of the abstract, tectonic paradigm he identifies with the pre-Columbian, the Inca. However, despite his rhetoric, his work effects *mestizaje*, and never illustrates his rhetoric. His ideology is undercut by the actuality, the force of the mestizo aesthesis of his visual praxis. In short, I employ *mestizaje* to indicate a mode of thought, and not an ontic category, although the latter shades of meaning reverberate throughout this text.¹¹

Most of my interpretive energies in Part 1 will be devoted to showing how Torres-García’s theoretical position is untenable in view of the complex historical overdermination his artwork attests to. In fact, his work can be seen as the operation of “border thinking” or “gnoseology” (Mignolo 2000), in that it involves a praxis that re-routes origins through the matrices of the European avant-garde, the colonial legacy, canonical art historical discourse, Andean abstraction and cosmology, all coming together on a highly charged canvas. As Mignolo defines it, ‘border thinking’ “capture[s] a wide range of forms of knowledge that ‘philosophy’ and ‘epistemology’ contributed to cast away” (Mignolo 2000, 10). I will highlight the instability of the conception of the primordial in constructive universalism that results from this confluence throughout Part

¹¹ The scope of this inquiry does not allow me a full investigation into the intellectual history of *mestizaje*. Undoubtedly, this would be necessary in order to ward off the danger of glorifying it. Nevertheless, I perceive a kinship with Serge Gruzinski’s notion of *mestizaje* as a mode of thought as developed in *The Mestizo Mind*. However, the constraints of the focus of this work prevented me from developing a full and nuanced theorization of *mestizaje* or work Gruzinski’s insights - or other theorizations of *mestizaje* - into my inquiry. See Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

1, all the while stressing how it undermines every word Torres-García has ever written as it pretends to speak the ‘truth’ of his painting.

In Part 2, I will subject ‘border gnosis’ to a critical reading by juxtaposing it with Oswald’s “Manifesto Antropófago,” the rallying cry of the Brazilian avant-garde movement. In Chapter 6, I will highlight Mignolo’s fetishization of the concept of ‘border’ as a transcendent given, by contrasting it with the manifesto’s neobaroque intransigence in the face of the line that divides. Instead of the clarity of the contour, antropofagia explores the deterritorializing power of the infinite fold, which makes the division outside/inside as but the function in a hyper-textual and hyper-visual configuration.

Diagrammatology, Constellation, Emblematics

Chapter 4 is the ‘hinge,’ the ‘spine’ of the diptych. It is the chapter where a first attempt is made to formulate a methodology, or rather, a quasi-methodology since the tracing of visual-verbal instabilities this work is concerned with insinuate themselves in my ekphrastic *poiesis*. Led by the exhibition *Inverted Utopias*, this chapter will try to articulate the relation between the visible and the legible through the idea of the ‘constellation.’ I will explore both Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno’s understanding of its power to unhinge habits of thought in the light of the exposition’s own reclamation of the term, and gauge whether a ‘constellation’ does not merely devolve into another thematic approach, thereby selling short its critical potential. Does the exhibition become another classifying instrument? Or does it evince a “constructive mind” in Adorno’s formulation, since “the idea of classification which subsumes the particular as example does not open it up; this can be done only by the constellation of concepts that the constructive mind brings to bear on it” (Adorno 2008, 136). This chapter will also engage a reading of Luis Bénédict’s installation *South-South*, prompting a reflection on the historicity of the notion of constellation, and the Western, scientific regime of legibility/visibility associated with it. The contingency of the hegemonic conception of the starry heavens above will become evident when contrasted to the Incaic

conception of the sky as a mixed composition of light dots and ‘dark cloud’ figures, revealing a counter-visibility.

Chapter 5 turns to antropofagia to examine the baroque and neobaroque, and how they question the very notion of legibility/visibility through a seeking out of indiscernibilities, of relations of inconstancy between the word and the image, meaning and materiality. Following Barbara Maria Stafford’s (1999) focus on visual analogy as an *ars combinatoria*, I will read antropofagia’s reclaiming of the colonial baroque as an engagement with the anarchic principle of visual association, evincing a neobaroque sensitivity to the boundlessness of the world of objects and how their juxtapositions result in new memory formations, in new legibilities and visibilities. It is here that I will pay closer attention to the reminiscences of anthropophagite painter Tarsila do Amaral, not in how they supposedly uncover the ‘true’ origin of the movement, but in the way they actively produce the regime of legibility of antropofagia through the rhetorical operation of *ars memoria*.

While Chapter 6 is a further elaboration on antropofagia’s *ars memoria* as the technics of association and recombination, I will pay closer attention - through a reading of the “Anthropophagite Manifesto” - to its polemical redistribution of the sensible. The sensory field of this text creates a recalcitrant visibility/legibility that does not prompt consumption, but forces one to think how images/words are ‘consumed’ in that the manifesto cracks open the continuum of reading and viewing by letting in the visual thickness by a reduction of the word to its intensity and citationality. Contrary to what the metaphor of cannibalism might suggest, it is not about the over-consumption of signs, but about the indigestion that follows the thinking of the echoes and reverberations the text condenses to the point of the enigmatic. The manifesto is an aphoristic ‘dyspeptics’ that generates excess through its extreme reduction - at least, this is what I will try to illustrate.

Finally, in Chapter 7, a name will emerge for the quasi-methodology that mobilizes the heuristic force of the word-image relation: emblematics. This name arises through a viewing/reading of a constellation of images and texts: Adriana Varejão’s *Proposal for a*

Catechesis (1993), Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's book *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul* (2011), Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropofago" (1928), Tarsila's paintings and sketches *Abaporu* (1928) and *Antropofagia* (1929) as well as Varejão's discourse recounting her discovery of the Barroco Mineiro, which is a contemporary, parodic re-routing of the 'origin story' of antropofagia as recited by Tarsila. Visual association is what will inform my methodological stance, leading to the 'baroque hypothesis' that antropofagia is the art of the incessant re-distribution of words and images, legibilities and visibilities. In a sense, antropofagia will not appear as art, but as the diagrammatology of art, a working out of what art might be, what it might look like, how it can come in and out of being through legibilities and visibilities. By taking my inspiration from Gregory L. Ulmer (1985), Janell Watson (2009), Félix Guattari (1995) and Anthony Auerbach (2011), antropofagia presents itself as a tactic intent on keeping the logic of the example at bay. It is diagrammatical in that it explores the intimate nexus of thought, reading, painting and drawing. In antropofagia, art does not function as a model or category, but as what creates its own models and modes of thought, modes that give a-semiosis a role in its malleable architecture, the Tupi putty of its being. I decide on 'emblematics,' as it is a mode of reading/viewing that thematizes its implication within the constitution of visibility from the outset. Emblematics is an ekphrastic praxis, a quasi-method that reflects on the registration of legibility in visibility and the eye in the text. It is a mood as much as a mode that itself desires to impact on the legibility/visibility of the work of art it borrows its spirit from.

**Part 1 Constructive Universalism's Self-
Deconstruction: The Word that Hides the
Opacity of the Image**

Chapter 1

1 A Prelude on Mapping and Arkhétectonics

This study is primarily concerned with the distribution of (the concepts of) word and image, with the thinking of their limit as well as their interpenetration and zones of indiscernibility. Because of the specificity of this perspective, two important qualifications are in order before the text proper can begin. In the discussion of the *Inverted Map*, I have chosen to focus on the relation between word and image within the theory of constructive universalism in order to demonstrate how the sensory field of the image loosens, interrogates, and controverts the dictates of Joaquín Torres-García's philosophy of art.

Because of this decision, that is, the focus on the a-signifying, non-discursive work of aesthesis, my discourse may appear somewhat myopic. The blind spots of the argument concern the status of the map, its historico-political dimensions, and its artistic reworking in (recent) art as constituting somewhat of a new genre. Of course, this is not to say that both aspects are absent from my discussion. Rather, it is to signal that these considerations are only peripherally addressed but were never far from my mind while writing. The images of the *Inverted Map*, as well as all visual artworks I co-construct through language, are always open to suggestion. I will start by making explicit these two areas open for further research.

Firstly, I am not concerned with providing an overarching, global account that would do justice to the complex dynamics of power at work in the negotiation and move towards standardization – the ‘gridding’ – of space, not to mention its coordination with an “empty, homogeneous time” (Benjamin 2003, 395)¹² in the birth of the idea of the

¹² This emptying of (the image of) time, this evacuation of the possibility of a sacred, inherently salvational meaning of history – a development accelerated through late capitalism – is what Walter Benjamin critiques in “On the Concept of History” (Benjamin 2003, 387-400). Torres-García implicitly shares Benjamin's diagnosis and cultural pessimism and sees history as progressively barred from redemptive potential, with the “angel of history” (ibid., 392) inexorably moving away, wings caught in the winds of the future. The “storm ... we call progress” (ibid.) blows redemption out of reach from the catastrophe that is the present. In order to restore a glimpse of transcendence and the angel's grace to a present defined by a

global.¹³ In the text that follows I can only provide a glimpse of the complex geographic appropriation of the ‘unknown’ New World and its incorporation into ‘known,’ old and ‘proven’ (mental) cartographies. The recent amount of study devoted to the subject matter attests to the formidable task involved, since geography, and the mapping of space in general (urban studies, architectural plans, etc.) is a complex site where regimes of legibility/visibility condense.¹⁴ It is also a nodal point where the re-workings of older models and the emergence of new models for/of thought become discernible. The print revolution, the expansion of mercantilism into a proto-global market capitalism, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the encounter with unfamiliar (from the perspective of the conquistador, at least) Amerindian regimes of legibility and visibility (their incomprehensible, ‘primitive’ ‘writing without words’), the incorporation of the non-European into scriptural-pictorial economies and autochthonous resistance to this operation, the syncretism of the Amerindian, African, European, and Oriental, the diasporic movements and displacements, the eradication of whole populations and the memory of genocide, the history of slavery, the violent catechization of a continent, the effect of Amerindian thought on classical and modern episteme – all of these issues have an effect on the reconceptualization of space, a history in which the rise of Western

cataclysmic profanation of temporality, Torres-García will formulate his messianic doctrine of constructive universalism as a way to charge the present with a sacred, utopian possibility. In his (doomed) attempt to produce an ‘auratic art’ in a “post-auratic era” (Moraña 2005, 241), Torres-García formulates a philosophy of art centered on the divinity of geometry – as opposed to its profanation as a tool for the ‘engineering’ of progress – as a way to reconnect with the sacred, spiritual dimension of life. Against the meaningless *telos* of empty progress, constructive universalism poses the mythic fullness of a *telos* that coincides with an absolute *arche*, i.e., the tectonic. For a critique of Torres-García’s ideology of origins, see section 1.3 of the current chapter.

¹³ The ‘global’ is, to paraphrase one of Walter Dignolo’s points in *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (2000), the end product of processes of capitalist expansion and the colonial dynamic that comes with it. The global is the *pars pro toto* of a specific locale, a specific ideology with its epistemic framework: Europe and its (Christian, monotheistic, Cartesian) understanding of being. Through a disequilibrium in power, the latter is elevated to the status of the universal, transparent and true. Spatial specificity is reified as the norm(al) and imposed upon the periphery – but not without resistance and local subversions in the form of “border gnosis,” which makes its way back to transform the hegemonic imagination (cf. Dignolo 2005, 49-88).

¹⁴ For an explanation of the way I use the conceptual constellation of legibility/visibility, see the Introduction.

epistemology, from the Renaissance onwards, becomes legible as the intertwining of effects of coloniality.¹⁵

In my discussion of the colonial operations of inscription, I rely on Michel de Certeau's conception of "scriptural economy" as developed in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984, 131-53). The scriptural operation, which, as tool of conversion, is indissociable from the religion of the written, authoritative Word, runs parallel with the socio-economic *conquista* of America and the fashioning of the West's self-image predicated on technological mastery. From de Certeau's perspective, writing, as the prosthetic of socio-economic mastery, amounts to the suppression and regulation – grammaticalization – of the indigenous voice. As de Certeau writes, "the multiple voices [were] set aside by the triumphal *conquista* of the economy that has, since the beginning of the 'modern age' (i.e., since the seventeenth or eighteenth century), given itself the name of writing" (1984, 131). However, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 2, this *conquista* through the economy of writing gave rise to a subversive *counter-conquista* in terms of a recalcitrant Amerindian visuality, traces of which insinuate themselves in Torres-García's graphism. I will read these traces as the correlative to de Certeau's nostalgia for a lost orality.

In analogy to this process of colonial inscription, I will adopt the term 'pictorial in-visioning' to refer to the visual incorporation of the New World within the epistemic

¹⁵ I can only point to sources – I have confined myself to English-language resources – that address these issues in more detail and which have proven seminal in my re-thinking of the problem of spatial representation and the dialectics of power and resistance. Walter Mignolo's *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995) is invaluable as a source for thinking the complex re-routings of representation and hegemony, as well as Ricardo Padrón's *The Spacious World: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain* (2004). *Mapping Latin America: A Cartographic Reader* (2011), edited by Jordana Dym and Karl Offen is an amply illustrated anthology relating the ways Latin American space has been imagined throughout history. For a discussion on the link between colonial urbanicity and architecture (and the façade in particular) through a consideration of painting, plans, maps attesting to dialogism of Amerindian and Hispanic forms, see Cody Barteet's "The Palace Façade and the Urban Form in the Documenting of Hispanic America" (1994). Other works include Irma B. Jaffe and Gianni Eugenio Viola's *Imagining the New World: Columbian Iconography* (1991), Kenneth Nebenzahl's *Maps from the Age of Discovery: Columbus to Mercator* (1990), David Buisseret's *The Mapmaker's Quest: Depicting New Worlds in Renaissance Europe* (2003). See also exhibition catalogues such as J.B. Harley, Ellen Hanlon and Mark Warhus's *Maps and the Columbian Encounter* (1990), John McCarter, James Akerman and Robert Karrow's *Maps: Finding Our Place in the World* (2007).

horizon of the West. Indeed, in addition to the inscription within the Eurocentric discursive regimes, the ‘New World’ also underwent a pictorial ‘inscription’ within the hegemonic regime of visibility through the representation of the American other through the representational canons of the West.¹⁶ Moreover, inscriptions and in-visionings had a reciprocal effect on Western regimes of legibility and visibility. With respect to material culture at large, and the baroque in particular, Lois Parkinson Zamora observes that “the baroque was also transformed in Europe by New World influences: its materials (silver from Mexico and Peru, ivory from the Philippines), its motifs (fauna and flora from the Caribbean, the Orinoco, the Amazon), and its methods (artistic, doctrinal, indoctrinating)” (Zamora 2009, 127).¹⁷

¹⁶ Bernadette Bucher’s *Icon and Conquest: A Structural Analysis of the Illustrations of De Bry’s Great Voyages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) pays attention to the ways in which the New World was subjected to the pictorial constraints of Western regimes of visibility. Bucher focuses on Theodor de Bry’s engravings, which theatricalized and displaced the European Reformation and Counter-Reformation struggles onto the scene of the *terra ignota*. I will return to Bucher’s work in Part 2 of this study (Chapter 7, section 7.2.3). For a thorough treatment of the ‘in-visioning’ of the colonial other with respect to the art of engraving and its influence in the production of the paradigm of ‘primitive art,’ see Michael Gaudio’s *Engraving the Savage: The New World and Techniques of Civilization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

¹⁷ I will return to the permutations of the baroque in Part 2, Chapters 5-7.

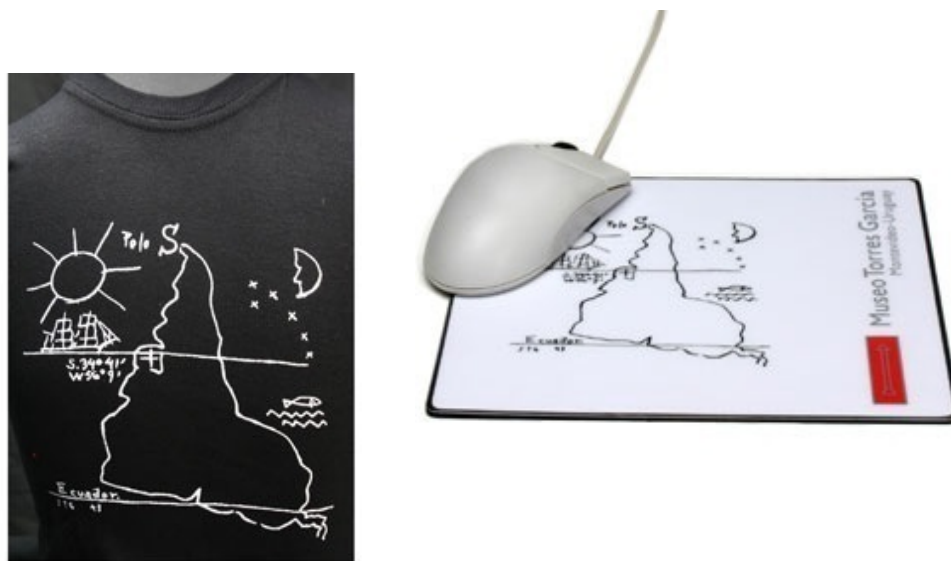


Figure 1.1 T-shirt and mouse pad with *Inverted Map* print.

[http://tienda.torresgarcia.org.uy/mvdcommerce/imgUpload/camiseta_americanag.jpg;

http://tienda.torresgarcia.org.uy/mvdcommerce/imgUpload/mousepad_427003g.jpg]

A second qualification is that my discussion of Torres-García's *Inverted Maps*, since it is mainly aimed at demonstrating how the hybridity of the visual always returns to deconstruct the logic of purity of constructive universalism's art philosophy, is not concerned with placing the work of Torres-García within the 'vanguard' of 'map art,' or any such conceptual recuperation within art historical terms. Provided Robert Silberman's central thesis in *World Views: Maps and Art* (1999) holds true, namely, that the rise of the artist's map coincided with the rise of Pop Art, then we can see Torres-García's *Inverted Map* as decidedly against the grain, as archaic anti-Pop in the extreme.¹⁸ He would be turning in his grave upon seeing that his *Inverted Map* has become a pop-icon, omnipresent on t-shirts, mugs, posters and trinkets – all licensed to the *Museo Torres García* in Montevideo, available upon exit through the gift shop (Figure 1.1.). This may be paraphrased in a pastiche of Theodor Adorno's pronouncement: art is indeed the "absolute commodity" (Adorno 1997, 21) minus the

¹⁸ In addition to Silberman's work there are other studies and catalogues that have more or less explicitly focused on the phenomenon of map art and the intersection of visual arts and cartography, including Katherine Harmon's *You are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps* (2004), Edward Casey's *Representing Space: Landscape Painting and Maps* (2001), *Mapping the Landscape: Essays on Art and Cartography* (1990), edited by Nicholas Alfrey and Stephen Daniels, *Art and Cartography: Six Historical Essays* (1987), edited by David Woodward, or essays such as Denis Cosgrove's, "Maps, mapping, Modernity: Art and Cartography in the Twentieth Century" (2005).

redemptive, utopian potential – commerce as usual.¹⁹ This pessimism would certainly have been shared by Torres-García.

1.1 Joaquín Torres-García and Constructive Universalism: Background

Before addressing the issue of the relation between painting and theory as it pertains to Torres-García's work, I will provide a short overview of Torres-García's work. In 1934, after an absence of forty-three years, Uruguayan painter Joaquín Torres-García (1874-1949) - aged sixty at the time - returned to his native Montevideo. The end of his prolonged European 'aesthetic education' – the last stage of which constituted his apprenticeship in the avant-garde in Paris and the struggle between figuration and abstraction enacted in his work – was signalled by the inversion of the map accompanying his essay "The School of the South." This "becoming-minor" of abstraction through its 'transplantation' to the periphery initiated the unfolding of the power of contestation inherent in Torres-García's marginal doctrine of 'constructive universalism,' marginal at least with respect to European abstraction and the canonization of the 'historical avant-garde.' Incidentally, I am borrowing the concept of "becoming-

¹⁹ In *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor Adorno locates the paradox of the work of art in its claim to autonomy. It is precisely in this claim that the artwork approximates the capitalist commodity the most – it is here that "the absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity" (Adorno 1997, 21). In his introduction to Adorno's *The Culture Industry*, J. M. Bernstein formulates this as the "hypocritical" essence of art, since "autonomous art arises fully only in a class society through the exclusion of the working classes. The purposelessness of pure works of art, which denies the utility and instrumentality that reign in the world outside art, is premised on commodity production. Works of art are commodities just the same, indeed pure commodities since they are valuable only to the extent that they can be exchanged. Works' non-utility, their 'unsaleability,' is the hypocritical source of their value; the art market is pure because unconstrained by need" (Adorno 2001, 10). Yet, in this parabolic rapprochement of art with the commodity through the artwork's cunning, the dream of its becoming a pure thing-in-itself is awakened, since autonomy – the freedom from market valuation – is dialectically intertwined with the fetishism of the market. Freedom and redemption are only thinkable within the confines of a capitalist logic. Art is only intelligible within a context of exploitation, but exploitation also frames the utopian possibilities for going beyond, for redemption of suffering. The empirical domain of the 'given' of which art partakes is simultaneously – through its indeterminacy, the aesthesis of its form, and thus also its meaning – utopian, as a calling to thought of "the yet-to-exist" (Adorno 1997, 135): "In the utopia of its form, art bends under the burdensome weight of the empirical world from which, as art, it steps away" (ibid., 105). Art is, and already is not, of this world. For a detailed account of the complex, negative dialectical interplay between the work of art and the commodity as Adorno conceived it in *Aesthetic Theory*, see Martin 2007, 15-26.

minor” from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who, in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986), define the “minor” (or “molecular”) as an inherent, subversive potentiality – the immanent possibility of “deterritorialization” – within the “major” (or “molar”) cultural structure, through a serial recombination of its constitutive elements. Through his peripheral position of enunciation as German-Czech Jew, Kafka is said to have deterritorialized standard literary German – the ‘high’ German of Goethe and German Romanticism – through a tactic of hollowing out, by wearing lyricism down and countering it with the minimalism of Prague German, “a deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 17). Kafka brings down the dignity of Germanic monumentality so as to revitalize language at its roots by his decision to write in “the German language of Prague as it is and in its very poverty” (ibid., 19). It is to revolutionize literature by observing these maxims:

Go always farther in the direction of deterritorialization, to the point of sobriety. Since the language is arid, make it vibrate with a new intensity. Oppose a purely intensive usage of language to all symbolic or even significant or simply signifying usages of it. Arrive at a perfect and unformed expression, a materially intense expression (ibid.).

Torres-García coined the name ‘constructive universalism’ in Paris in 1932 to make his own praxis legible and differentiate it from the hegemony of cubism, geometric abstraction, and Neo-Plasticism. This eking out of a divergent position would intensify after the reorienting gesture of the inverted map, and gain momentum by an increasing approximation of its principles to what he saw as the essence of pre-Columbian art. Torres-García effected the becoming-minor of abstraction – geometric abstraction in particular – through its relocation to the South, where it mutated, through the influx of the Inca tectonic paradigm, into a hybrid, *mestizaje* configuration of figuration and abstraction. What Peter Bürger (1984) dubbed the “historical avant-garde” – the ‘major’ formation of European avant-garde phenomena during the first half of the twentieth century that has fossilized into an institutionalized historic moment and is now an object of intense inquiry and nostalgia – is relayed to the periphery, in order to give birth to a

counter-history and a divergent reading of the avant-garde. This is what the *Inverted Map* signals to the world.²⁰

Before his arrival in Paris in 1926, Torres-García had had little or no intensive contact with the avant-garde. He received his formal education in Spain, at the Academia de Belles Artes and at the Cercle Artistic de Sant Lluc. His initial orientation was decidedly neo-classical, as well Neo-Platonic; the latter as it were already clearing the ground for his later rapprochement with the Neo-Plasticism of Mondriaan and Van Doesburg. During his stay in Barcelona, he associated himself with *Noucentisme*, a

somewhat nationalistic movement [that] represented a reaction against various nineteenth century styles: academicism, romanticism, even French Impressionism. The *Noucentiste* painter aimed for classicism and objectivity, achieved through flat pastel colours, clean contours, sculpted volumes and idyllic Mediterranean pastoral or allegorical subjects (Rowell 1985, 10).

His classical allegorical ‘fresco’ style, and the influence of the work of Puvis de Chavannes, is evident in the mural works that were commissioned for the Barcelona Palau de la Generalitat de Catalunya, most of which were never finished due to political circumstances (Figure 1.2). Dissatisfied with the artistic climate, and turning his back on the Catalan Renaissance, he moved to New York in 1920, where he became increasingly attuned to modern life; his art now evinced a more dynamic, graphic style characterized by cubist schematization in counter-point to his Arcadian Neoclassicism. The latter works were deemed out of touch with the times, while his new art was seen as more in tune with a legibility that valued the distinctly modern phenomenon and interpretation of life. In 1926 he moved to Paris, abandoned his ‘anachronistic’ fresco style, and attempted to synchronize his work with the ruling avant-garde idiom.

²⁰ See Section 1.3 (“Constructive Universalism and the Artifice of *Arkhéctonics*”) for more on the subversive implications of Torres-García’s re-routing of European abstraction – via the relay of European primitivism – through the Andean paradigm.

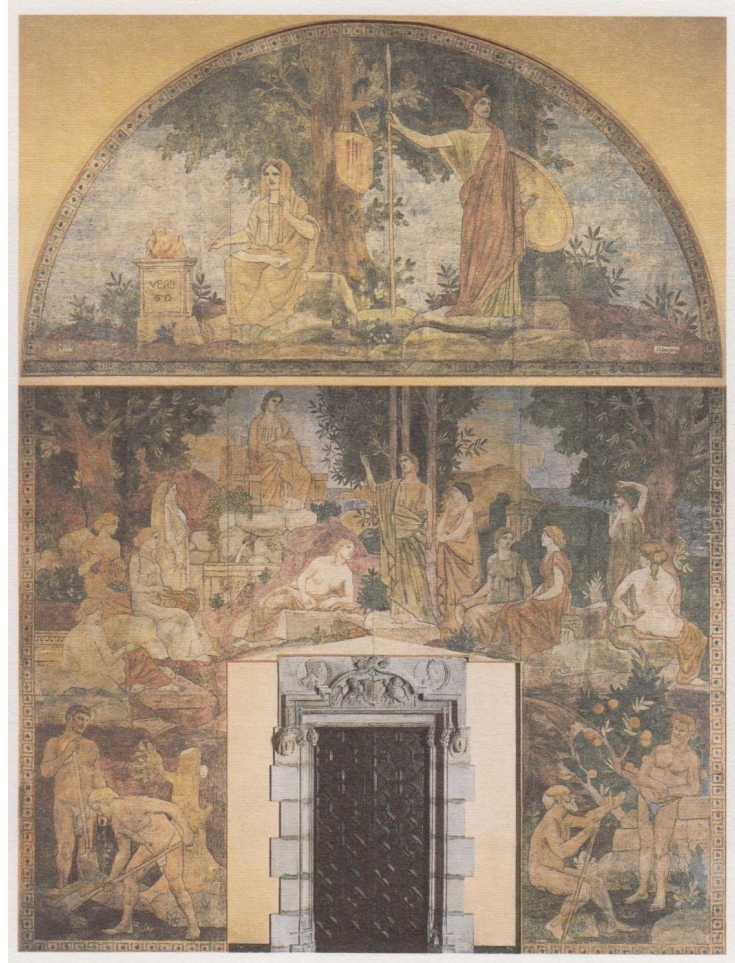


Figure 1.2 Torres-García, *The Eternal Catalonia*, 1923. First fresco executed for the Saló Sant Jordi, Sala Torres-García, Palau de la Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona. [Margit Rowell, Joaquín Torres-García (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 2009), 13].

However, his approach to the avant-garde was always idiosyncratic; he was always somehow ‘out of step,’ not willing to compromise the contradictory tension of his own visual research – the friction between naturalism and abstraction – to be pacified by pledging allegiance to a dogmatics of style, to a disciplinary movement, to an identification with an -ism. His embrace of the ‘new’ was always provisional – it was always counteracted by the pull of the ‘archaic,’ of painterly tradition. His avant-garde was muted, tentative, restless, at odds with itself.

In fact, he never truly abandoned the basic tenets of his Neoclassicism, in that he saw the preoccupation with pure plastic form in geometric abstraction as a logical extrapolation of his own concerns with the planar dimension of painting already evident

in his neo-classical work. Neither did he condemn surrealism, since he saw its concern with the unconscious as similar to his formulation of ‘Abstract Man’ as the salvaging of a primitive vitality, although in his writing Torres-García consistently equates vitalism and the unconscious with rationality and structure, thus inverting the surrealist valuations.²¹ The doctrine of ‘Abstract Man’ is primarily a humanist aesthetic philosophy. It sets out to de-alienate man from his reified existence attendant on capitalism, which explains why Torres-García considered surrealism not so much a revolutionary, subversive ethos, but as a praxis reconnecting with the vital forces of man deadened by industrialization. He saw it in terms of a renaissance of vitality rather than a revolutionary mode.²²

This accounts for his uneasy relation to Neo-Plasticism; although he felt close to the work of Mondriaan, Vantongerloo, and Van Doesburg, he was never at ease with doctrinal geometric abstraction. In 1930, together with Michel Seuphor, he set up the more eclectic group *Cercle et Carré*, which organized a group exhibition and published a short-lived review under the same name.²³ It was also in Paris in 1932 that he found a name, a regime of legibility,²⁴ for his own praxis: *universalismo constructivo*, constructive universalism, which, after his return to Montevideo, would involve a resolute turn to the South. Roughly speaking, constructive universalism is not so much an aesthetic as a metaphysical credo: it names the desire to return to living archaic forms that fuse avant-garde principles of abstraction in a harmony with the here-and-now. It is decidedly utopian: its hope is to constitute a new world with a new set of ritual practices, setting up a zone of indeterminacy between life and art, as a way of re-enacting the ancient, pre-modern integration of life and art through the principles of geometry and proportionality. The aim is to make the ‘new’ reverberate with the ‘primitive,’ with the

²¹ For a short sketch of Torres-García’s vitalist ontology, see section 1.3 of this chapter.

²² For more on his complex relation with surrealism, see Nicolette Gast’s text “Torres-García in Paris” (in Kattouw 1992, 70-103), in which Theo van Doesburg adduces the Uruguayan’s refusal to condemn surrealism – and figuration – as one of the reasons for the break between Neo-Plasticism and constructive universalism.

²³ Additional information on *Cercle et Carré* can be found in Roque 2003, 181-186. For a monograph on *Cercle et Carré*, see Marie-Aline Prat’s *Cercle et Carré: Peinture et avant-garde au seuil des années 30* (Lausanne: l’Age d’homme, 1984).

²⁴ See the Introduction for an account of my use of the intertwined conceptual pair legibility/visibility.

originary cosmic unity of man and nature, in the hopes of constituting a continuum with the origin and the now; to re-enchant the world, in short. Torres-García found the wellspring of this re-enchantment in the pre-Columbian, as the possible catalyst for a new idea of history, a history in which the implications of the abstract in the renewal of the life of spirit were to be resumed, after the violent interruption by the ‘decadence’ of figuration of the colonizers (cf. Paternosto 2001, 51-111; Rowell in Ramírez 2009, 118-129).²⁵

Autonomy and ‘Ethnographic Abstraction’

For his project of re-enchantment, Torres-García enacts an ‘ethnographic abstraction,’ which is comparable to what James Clifford dubbed “ethnographic surrealism” (Clifford 1988, 117-151). With “ethnographic surrealism,” Clifford refers to the intertwining, in the twenties and thirties, of surrealism and the emerging science of ethnography and anthropology, producing “a more general cultural predisposition that cuts through modern anthropology and that this science shares with twentieth-century art and writing. The ethnographic label suggests a characteristic attitude of participant observation among the artifacts of a defamiliarized cultural reality” (ibid., 121). In the case of constructive universalism, the ethnographic gaze is driven by the abstract geometric paradigm. Through his discovery of pre-Columbian art at the Trocadéro Museum in Paris, Torres-García progressively reframed geometric abstraction and the principles of Neo-Plasticism through the matrix of an Inca and pre-Inca tectonic paradigm.²⁶ The latter allowed him to

²⁵ For Torres-García’s own formulation of the “decadence” of the “imported styles” of the “invaders,” and the ensuing “bastard culture” that took hold in Latin America, see Torres-García, qtd. in Ramírez 1992, 80ff.

²⁶ James Clifford emphasizes the importance of Paris’s Trocadéro Museum of Ethnography in the development of the paradigm of the European avant-garde and primitive art, attaining an almost mythical status where the non-European could be encountered to revitalize European art. “Before 1930 the Trocadéro was a jumble of exotica. ... Since the collection lacked an up-to-date scientific, pedagogical vision, its disorder made the museum a place where one could go to encounter curiosities, fetishized objects. It was here that Picasso, around 1908, began to make a serious study of *l’art nègre*” (Clifford 1988, 135). Important for the theory of abstraction is that Wilhelm Worringer did a great deal of his research at the Trocadéro for what was to become, in 1906, his doctoral dissertation *Abstraction and Empathy* (cf. Worringer 1997, viii-ix). After the reorganization of the museum in the early thirties by Georges Rivière the chief curator, “the museum was becoming chic” (Clifford 1988, 136). The Trocadéro was also of paramount importance to Torres-García’s formulation of constructive universalism. His son Augusto was

envision a new art that would assume an integral function in the social fabric through its quasi-religious status. In fact, constructive universalism's 'ethnographic abstraction' is in line with Bürger's characterization of the avant-garde's ethos of the reconciliation of life and art: "The avant-garde intends the abolition of autonomous art by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life" (Bürger 1984, 54). In the case of Torres-García, this reintegration was to be accomplished by charging the abstract geometric paradigm of the historical avant-garde with Inca primitivism. Constructive universalism was to restore the ritual, cosmological embedding of art in life.²⁷

This project of renewal through the construction of an affinity with the primitive would assume a more concrete inflection after Torres-García's return to Montevideo in 1934. Given the new location of constructive universalism, the 'primitive' would be progressively associated with the pre-Columbian. In fact, the actuality of this relocation, of his final 'homecoming,' made constructive universalism appear viable, and not merely a wish. To hasten in this new era, Torres-García embarked on an intensive pedagogical project and in 1935, he established the AAC, the *Asociación de Arte Constructivo* (Association of Constructive Art), for the purpose of disseminating and educating Uruguay – and by extension South America in general – into the principles of abstraction. In addition, the Association published *Círculo y cuadrado*, an important review and resumption of *Cercle et carré*, but with a pronounced, localized focus on the continuity between Amerindian and constructive universalist art. After the dissolution of the AAC

hired by the museum's director, Paul Rivet, with whom Joaquín Torres-García had a cordial relationship, to "catalogue the pottery from the ancient Peruvian Nazca culture" (Rowell in Ramírez 2009, 123). His work was thus instrumental in the transition of the museum as a grand cabinet of curiosities into a systemized collection. It is at the Trocadéro, and through the 1928 exhibition 'Les Art anciens de l'Amérique' held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (cf. Ramírez 2009, 122), that Torres-García gained insight into the geometric visual language of the pre-Columbian, which would allow him to read geometric abstraction as part of an ancient Andean tectonic paradigm rather than a form of European avant-garde experimentation. I will further elaborate on his construction of the Andean, tectonic paradigm in Section 1.3, "Constructive Universalism and the Artifice of *Arkhetectonics*."

²⁷ As will become apparent in Part 2 (Chapters 5-7), it is the desire for the reintegration of art into life – and the antinomy life versus art – that antropofagia will mock through its mobilization of baroque artifice and erudition, which it foregrounds as constituting the 'fabric of life' itself.

in 1940, Torres-García formed the Taller Torres-García (the Torres-García workshop, TTG) in 1944, an informal collective for teaching and a studio for visual experimentation and collective commissions.

Torres-García envisioned his pedagogical task not as an education, but as a profound re-education intent on redeeming the forgotten pre-Columbian heritage of abstraction. It was an attempt to reverse what he saw as the ‘decadence’ of colonial art, to ‘decontaminate’ the South from ‘imported styles.’ Torres-García’s discourse frames naturalism as the most anti-natural and reifying impulse. Throughout his teachings, he consistently aestheticizes the colonial as an adherence to the sensible, phenomenal world, while a true, vital art could only arise through the reconnection with the ruins of the tradition at hand. This could only succeed through the reactivation of Amerindian abstraction and geometry, which meant that constructive universalism consistently privileged the abstract properties of Inca and pre-Inca visuality, while playing down the importance of more figural traditions.

By its own logic, constructive universalism purportedly does not appropriate the pre-Columbian in a purely ‘formalist’ way. Torres-García reads the pre-Columbian as an allegorical structure rooted in the signified ‘Abstract Man’ – the master signifier of all his theoretical writings after his return to the South. What his discourse claims is a ‘deep,’ eidetic appropriation effected through the conceptual, and not the ‘superficial’ sensible givens of pre-Columbian remains. The patterns, shapes, and colours that make up the *actual* visibilities of the pre-colonial ruins are dismissed so they can be framed as but the contingent expressions of an eternal will to abstraction and proportionality. Constructive universalism reads these as symptomatic of the unconscious as an Apollonian principle, allowing Torres-García to reconstruct a universal Spirit of abstraction as well as an idealist image of history.²⁸ He discerns traces of the universally human will to abstraction

²⁸ I am of course referring to Friedrich Nietzsche’s dialectic between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, as expounded in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1999). As Antoon Van den Braembussche summarizes the constitutive interplay between the artwork’s two poles, “the Dionysian embodies the chaotic, all-destructive, ecstatic rapture: it is the primal source of creation, still formless. Apollonian measure and harmony thus have to curb and give shape to uncontrolled Dionysian rapture. Without this Apollonian form-giving power, the artist cannot mold the overwhelming inspiration, the immense rapture of the Dionysian in a work of art”

everywhere, and across all times, allowing him to posit an a-historical, plastic essence. His eye, predisposed to discern the golden section, rational structure, and geometric principles, reads pre-Columbian artefacts as instantiation of the will to harmony that his own work sets out to create.

His appropriation is thus conceptual-allegorical in that he projects the central terms of constructive universalism onto a collection of disparate ruins, so as to reassemble them and make them constitutive of his own visual praxis: the sensory is but the “provocative” (W. J. T. Mitchell 1986, 93) for the noumenal. The visual is never encountered on its own terms: its opaque materiality is repressed.²⁹ Torres-García’s allegorization is ideational, informed by the Neo-Platonic doctrine of anamnesis (cf. below), and does not take heed of the essential materiality of the ruin as an enigmatic physical remainder worked over by history.

Torres-García as Neo-Classical Allegorist

To formulate it according to the operative distinction developed by Walter Benjamin, what constructive universalism develops is a (neo-classical) symbolic system and not a dynamic allegoresis. In fact, it can be argued that constructive universalism, as a philosophy of art, can only work by discarding the essential materiality of the ruin in the assemblage of an allegorical configuration. As Walter Benjamin shows in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1977), the ruin, the fragment, is inextricably tied to materiality;

(Braembussche 2009, 89). Torres-García equates the primal instinct of man with the tectonic, form-giving drive for measure. In a sense then, his theory of abstraction equates the Apollonian with the Dionysian since the former is cast as embodying the instinctual life of man in the form of a geometric vitality Torres-García saw instantiated in Inca art as well as early Egyptian and archaic Greek art.

²⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell explains the Platonic meaning of ‘provocative’ as “an imperfect picture or likeness that provokes reflection” (Mitchell 1986, 93). He goes on to quote Socrates in *The Republic*, who favours “reports of our perception” that “always invite the intellect to reflection because the sensation yields nothing that can be trusted” (ibid., n14). Through its “rhetoric of purity” (Cheetham 1991), constructive universalism evinces a distrust with the materiality of its own visual praxis as it presents itself to sensory perception. The sensory is always relegated back to the ‘logical field,’ with the image merely functioning as a disposable prolepsis to reflection. I adopt the concept of ‘logical field’ in tandem with Lyotard’s notion of the “sensory field” (2011). The former thematizes the epistemological, propositional content discourses aspire to, its communicational, informational level so to speak. This ‘logical field’ is constitutively fractured from ‘within’ by its ‘visual’ “thickness” (Lyotard 2011, 24ff). I will return to both concepts in the course of this and the following chapter.

immanence is dialectically intertwined with the transcendent - in the basic sense of a meaning that transcends mere materiality - and involves (cultural) labour, in this case the work of allegory.³⁰ “Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things” (Benjamin 1977, 178). Constructive universalism negates the thingly aspect of the ruin and makes its own praxis legible as thought only: the Andean remnants are only allowed to appear as the *eidos* of the Andean. The pre-Columbian ruin is distorted to unequivocally testify to “its beauty as a symbol” (Benjamin 1977, 176).³¹ What is silenced are the bare bones of the “truth content” of the Inca ruin, with its “material content” worn down, eroded and reshaped by history, coloniality and violence, positioned in the here-and-now of a European-Andean, post-Columbian mestizo world.³² Because constructive universalism cannot think the ruin as the end product of history and can only read it as the trace of a perfect, absolute beginning, it represses the actuality of hybridity as a dynamic of perpetual tension.³³

By contrast, constructive universalism’s “rhetoric of purity” (Cheetham 1991) suppresses the materiality of the ruin in favour of its eidetic appropriation. In *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting*, Mark A.

³⁰ In the context of Benjamin’s analysis of the seventeenth century German baroque, the ruin is itself the cipher of the material, profane, biological world doomed to decay, which the allegorical rearrangement - the ‘collage’ of its parts - must transcend in order to give meaning to life, and provide humanity - in the sense of the earthly, the creaturely - with the hope of redemption in the light of a now receding, contested God (cf. Benjamin 1977, 176-182).

³¹ I will elaborate on Torres-García’s strategy of disembodied allegorization in my reading of his essay “The School of the South” (cf. Chapter 3, section 3.2).

³² Although it can in some sense be perceived as a ‘purification,’ Benjamin stresses that “truth content” is by no means stable: its very being is historically malleable. An age can witness a renaissance through the historical contingency of the truth content it recovers, through allegory, from the ruins, endowing them with a renewed legibility that serves as the motor for a perpetual cultural dynamic of appropriations and re-appropriations. Indeed, “in the last analysis structure and detail are always historically charged. ... [The] transformation of material content into truth content makes the decrease in effectiveness, whereby the attraction of earlier charms diminishes decade by decade, into the basis for a rebirth, in which all ephemeral beauty is completely stripped off, and the work stands as a ruin” (Benjamin 1977, 182).

³³ That Benjamin’s study is concerned with the baroque is highly significant in this regard. Constructive universalism, predicated as it is on the autarchy of the perfect, neo-classical symbol, perceives the colonial baroque and its logic of allegorical dispersal as unintelligible. Torres-García sees in the colonial baroque the summit of ‘decadence.’ For his egregious condemnation of the colonial as a monstrous, “bastard culture” (Torres-García, qtd. in Ramírez 1992, 80), see my discussion of his text “The School of the South” in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2).

Cheetham (1991) presents a genealogy of the “rhetoric of purity” – the “ideology of abstraction” (39) – of abstract painting, tracing affinities between Gauguin, Mondriaan and Kandinsky. As Cheetham illustrates, abstraction legitimated its praxis by a rhetorical turn to Neo-Platonic theory and its doctrine of anamnesis, the remembering of archetypal forms. Abstraction, and herein it can be considered the true heir to symbolism rather than a formalist movement exploring the ‘essence’ of painting (the two-dimensional), grounds its aesthetic in the primordality of the eidetic, of the ideal realm in the Platonic sense, as guarantee for its truth. The central paradox, the irresolvable antinomy abstraction sets up for itself – almost like a trap – is between sensibility and the noumenal. Abstraction desires the world of ideas, but must, to be art, contend with materiality and give shape to the noumenal. The work of Torres-García evinces the same constitutive impossibility that Cheetham describes as follows:

The metaphysics of purity leaves the abstractionists with the paradox of an absolute that must appear in what is by definition a tainted, material form; simultaneously, this doctrine also constrains them to look for ultimate purity beyond art as an autonomous category (107).

The paradox “forces abstract art to deny frequently its existence as material” (ibid.). It is this negation that Torres-García voices in his theoretical texts, and which becomes even more strident - and problematic - after his return to Montevideo. Indeed, the return politicized - by aestheticizing, and through a doctrinal hardening - this rhetoric by adding an unexpected ‘local’ specter of impurity it encountered and set out to contain: *mestizaje*. Constructive universalism aestheticized its rhetoric of purity, thus forcing it in the direction of an ideological, colonial insistence intent on stifling post-Columbian heterogeneity and hybridity. Abstraction becomes a matter of racial purity, of fidelity to the pre-Columbian, absolutely non-European *arche* of geometric principles of art.³⁴

In order to effect this idealization, Torres-García frames the pre-Columbian as the ‘illustration’ of his own theory. Constructive universalism is charged with an impossible task: it must make visible, through its discourse, the unequivocal, spiritual, non-visible truth of the pre-Columbian work of art, revealing its essence as *eidos* instead of *aesthesis*.

³⁴ I will return to the more problematic ideological implications of Torres-García’s ‘Abstract, Universal Man’ in Section 1.3 and Chapter 2.

At the same time, it produces new works that are made legible as attesting to this same primordial spirituality associated with a pure, Inca abstraction before its demise through colonization and figuration. To that end, Torres-García's philosophy of art erects a system of tautological analogies intent on relegating the visual appearance of pre-contact remnants to the purely symbolic-discursive, as instantiations of authentic, pre-Columbian 'Abstract Man.' However, as will become evident in the analysis of some of the works, the theoretical edifice is at odds with the *mestizaje* of Torres-García's visual experiments.

1.2 Mapping in Freehand: Inverted Maps

The gesture seems simple enough: draw a map of South America, and then turn it upside down. At least, this is what the title of the drawing, *Inverted Map of South America* (figure 1.3), would have one believe. Yet, the image is reluctant to give in to the confidence of its caption; there is *dissimulation* at work here. It would perhaps be more accurate to describe the image as the drawing of a map in such way that it seems to have undergone an inversion. It is only a seeming inversion, since the gridlines of the map are intact: all the ciphers are in their right - readily decodable - place, with the letters “América del Sur” still in their reassuring upright alphabetical order, the coordinates S 34° 41' W 56° 9' - the latitude and longitude of Montevideo³⁵ - not demanding any awkward gesture to be made legible. The *Inverted Map* is not a puzzle – an intellectual exercise – with an easy solution: turning the drawing upside-down will not make things right again. The inversion runs deeper.³⁶

³⁵ Today, the ‘official’ coordinates for Montevideo are set at 34°53'1"S 56°10'55"W. Did the mapping technology in 1936 not yet allow an exact, fully refined determination of the position of the city, a technology of localization that is now canonized through the dictates of GPS? If so, then the element of history – through numerical ‘displacement’ of a point on the map – contradicts the a-historical neutrality, the truthfulness of the map and the cartographic grid. Science, as the system of ‘objective truth,’ can never account for its own history, which seems to it something of an embarrassment in that it undermines the universality, transparent ‘givenness,’ and self-evidence of its claims, as if they were not the products of labour. Or, perhaps a less likely hypothesis, did Torres-García deliberately put Montevideo a little ‘off,’ thus rendering the numerical register somewhat hermetic, as a cipher for his own fascination with the mystical meaning of numbers?

³⁶ The inversion could signal an anxiety with modern technologies of vision. This is an attractive hypothesis given constructive universalism’s renunciation of perspective, whose optical laws would prove fundamental to the development of new media, which were being popularized during Torres-García’s lifetime (i.e., film, photography). Sarabia (2010, 297-310) notes Torres-García’s general unease with the “Age of Reproducibility” (Benjamin 2003, 251ff), and offers the hypothesis that his practice of ‘manuscription’ can be considered a ‘defense mechanism’ against new technologies. At the same time, this archaism would paradoxically link Torres-García to the experimentations of Concrete Poetry in its exploration of the visual aspects of writing, as well as with painters experimenting with *écriture*. This would give his willed archaism an unexpected futurist connotation. For more on Torres-García’s *grafismo* and manuscript, see Chapter 2.

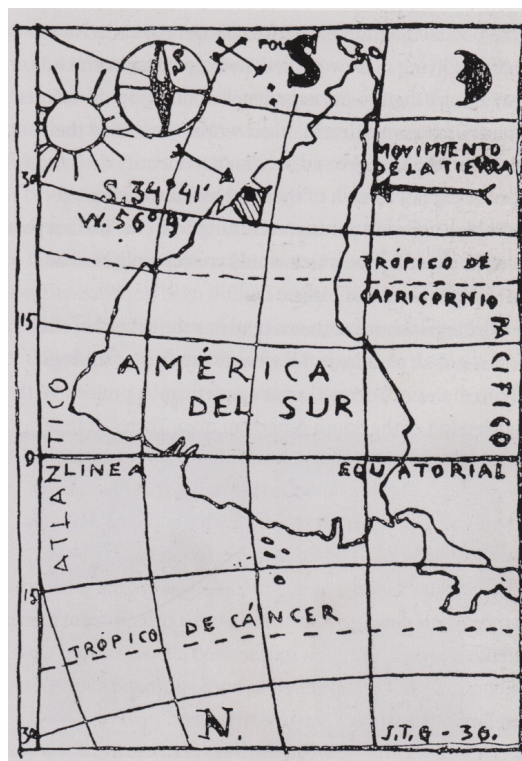


Figure 1.3 Joaquín Torres-García, *South America's Inverted Map*. Ink on paper, reproduced in *Círculo y cuadrado*, 1 May 1936. [Rolinka Kattouw, ed., *The Antagonistic Link: Joaquín Torres-García, Theo Van Doesburg* (Amsterdam: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1991), 136].

Joaquín Torres-García's drawing – a first version making its appearance in the opening issue of the review *Círculo y cuadrado* in 1936 (Figure 1.3), the magazine being the continuation, the 'relocation' of the Parisian *Cercle et Carré* – suggests the detachability of figure, the continent, from grid-overlay. What is constant, the invariable, is the grid, as the 'lamination' of the figure underneath, of what the grid supposedly maps. It is static, impervious to the gesture of inversion, or so it seems. The figure 'underneath,' still caught in the confines of the cartographic coordinates, is what has been overturned. Yet, it becomes apparent that the figure and grid cannot be so easily dissociated here, in this map that is not truly a map since it does not give us any 'straight' directions. There is an intimacy between the figure and the grid, or at least, between the *contours* of the South and the *names* handwritten on its surface. What is constant are the gridlines, the lines of geometric projection of a Gaussian coordinate system. The points of the compass, north, south, east, and west have changed place, that is to say, their

names – not their positions – have been substituted, as have the names of both the tropics. Yet, at the same time, our bodily, intuitive spatial sense of up, down, left and right are now in open contradiction with cartographic convention, and its customary conceptual alignments: a sense of vertigo follows the realization of this strange disconnect.

The contours of South America are familiar enough; indeed, they are part of a cartographic literacy dating back centuries. In fact, the shape of the South, the fixing of the figure of South America occurred relatively soon after the ‘discovery’ of the ‘unknown’ world in 1492. “It was toward 1555 that the world began to look to our hypothetical European observer very much as it does today for many people on this planet” (Mignolo 1995, 266). This ‘New World,’ its only ‘novelty’ really being that it constituted a blind spot, an embarrassment to be overcome in Western epistemology, which – through operations of its alphabetization, its incorporation within a phonological scriptural economy amounting to the suppression of complex indigenous picto-ideographic matrices of communication and expression – would soon be framed as a supplement, and be made legible and visible as a mirror-image, a ‘misquote,’ of the Old, ‘original’ continent.³⁷ The latter valuation, of the original continent in relation to its epigone, also indicates the extent to which space was temporalized: the South was framed as the anachronistic, ‘backward,’ ‘primitive’ region out of synch with the civilized North; the task at hand was to incorporate it within the same teleology.

Cartographic Cosmology/Cosmological Cartography

The ‘meaningless lump’ that would be named ‘America’ was *produced* as meaningless prior to its hegemonic inscription and in-visioning: the blank slate was the product of the European’s encounter with – that is to say, the inevitable failure to take cognizance of – indigenous regimes of intelligibility at odds with the Western demands of

³⁷ For Latin American tactics of subversion in the visual arts that counteract the epigonal status it has been burdened with through coloniality, see Andrea Giunta’s “Strategies of Modernity in Latin America” (in Mosquera 1996, 52-67). As I will argue in Part 2 (Chapters 5 and 6 in particular), antropofagia embraces its hegemonic imagining as ‘misquote’ by a contrapuntal, parodic appropriation of citations and echoes from the ‘respectable’ European intellectual tradition. This economy of citation is a baroque exercise of anti-colonial subversion and is the opposite of Torres-García’s obsession with ‘authenticity’ defined in terms of a pure pre-Columbian essence untainted by European influences.

epistemological pertinence. This demand for legibility was inextricably linked to highly specific and historically determined material formats for cognitive pertinence: the alphabetic writing of the book on the one hand, and the paragon of figurative, ‘life-like’ art on the other, i.e., the medium of painting.³⁸ The formats and knowledges in place could simply be discarded as inexistent, or merely outdated, ‘quaint’ in the best of cases. The formless mass would be moulded through cartographic projections, the Cartesian coordinate system in tandem with the operations of the European scriptural and pictorial economies, not to mention the substitution of a tributary system into a mercantile and later global capitalist system of circulation. Thus the outlines of a ‘timeless,’ ‘neutral’ shape of a continent came into view, a continent named in honour of its ‘discoverer,’ a name first used in print, in an image, by the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller, in his map *Universalis Cosmographia* of 1507 (Figure 1.4), a name that stuck.³⁹ Every *letrado* today *knows* what (South) America, what planet earth for that matter, *looks like*: its ‘visual identity’ is the effect of a specific, historical regime of resemblance, of visual analogy, of visual literacy and legibility – the correct *naming* of shapes through projections – instilled through the discipline of many a geography lesson.

³⁸ César Paternosto never tires of pointing out that painting, the application of pigment on canvas, is a Western European medium and was instrumental in the development of the institution of art and its progressive divorce from the social. The autonomization of art “culminated as recently as the end of the Middle Ages, when sculpture and painting separated from architecture and defined themselves, during the Renaissance, as autonomous categories. The development of easel painting, an artistic form that has no counterpart in other cultures, is the most significant aspect of this evolution” (Paternosto 1996, 6). It is as if painting, through its genealogy alone, will always be but an exercise in Western, hegemonic, colonial metaphysics.

³⁹ For a compelling study of the cartographic incorporation of the New World into the regime of spatial rationalization of Western episteme and the material formats it demanded, as well as hybrid forms evincing indigenous resistance to this colonial cartographic imposition, see Walter Mignolo’s *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995), especially “Part 3: The Colonization of Space,” 219-335.



Figure 1.4 Martin Waldseemüller. *Universalis Cosmographia Secundum Ptholomaei Traditionem et Americi Vespucii Aliorū[m]que Lustrationes*, [St. Dié], 1507. One map on 12 sheets, made from original woodcut. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress. [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/eb/Waldseemuller_map%2C_complete.jpg].

Torres-García's shaping of South America is recalcitrant through its acts of wilful disobedience, its inversion of the lesson in self-evidence, making the transparency of the geometric grid complicit in a thickening of the map, rendering it opaque, even slightly absurd when inverted contours are placed within the confines of horizontal and vertical axes that carry the aura of scientificity. Indeed, what sense does it make to provide accurate coordinates for an inverted world? Does the inversion not revert back to the very principle of mapping itself, in which the latter is understood as the construction of a world picture devoid of inherent meaning?⁴⁰ As if to parody the Cartesian endeavour of

⁴⁰ As Heidegger suggests, this *Weltbild* – world picture – is empty, homogeneous, quantifiable and ultimately nihilistic space brought into being by modernity, producing the modern subject as the purveyor of meaning to a space he himself has emptied. Representation, *Vor-stellung* in general, can be seen as the evacuation of qualitative differences over and against which the subject can 'will' his own values, project his own meanings, as if the world were just a blank slate to be inscribed by a sovereign – colonizing – subject, making sense of the amorphous. In a sense this subject makes the world 'new' – that is to say, empty of any meaning it might have come with in advance – with every glance. As Heidegger puts it in "The Age of the World Picture," "to represent [*vor-stellen*] means to bring what is present at hand [*das Vorhandene*] before oneself as something standing over against, to relate it to oneself, to the one representing it, and to force it back into this relationship to oneself as the normative realm" (Heidegger 1977, 131). The world is made to live up to the standards of intelligibility of the subject: the world is

coordination, South is now located on top, and North is located below – the compass now points south, in defiance to the decrees of the magnetic North, and both tropics having changed place – while the map still insists on the correctness of the latitude and longitude - S 34° 41' W 56° - it offers. Furthermore, the earth now rotates in counterpoint – as if in a perpetual turn backwards on itself, always moving towards the sun – with the movement of the earth going from right to left, heeding the same law of an inverted world, where east has become west, and west is now east, and where, perhaps, left is right, up is down, and past is future.

disenchanted, atomized into measurable particles, and becomes tautological with the subject. To understand is to measure; meaning is that which is projected onto the image by the subject. To know is to master. “Man makes depend upon himself the way in which he must take his stand in relation to whatever is as the objective. There begins that way of being human which mans the realm of human capability as a domain given over to measuring and executing, for the purpose of gaining mastery over that which is as a whole” (ibid., 132). It is this image of modernity that Torres-García puts on its head by imbuing it with a cosmological dimension and an irrepressible *mestizaje*, a retrofitting of the ancient onto the modern, thereby anticipating the post-modern in spite of his ‘rhetoric of purity.’



Figure 1.5 Issue 1 of *Circulo y cuadrado*, May 1936. Collection Fundación Torres-García, Montevideo.

Torres-García distorts the strictness of the canonical geography lesson not only by turning the figure and the parameters of spatial orientation upside-down but also through the playfulness of drawing and writing by hand. Both grid and figure evince the same gestural register, an impression strengthened by the pictogram of the sun and the moon, which give the image a certain childlike naivety. This effect of the naïve offsets the sternness of the geometrical composition, a disciplinarity muted by the aleatory traces of freehand. It is not just the child, but the pre-Columbian who enters the picture here. More precisely, it is the association of the child and the youth of mankind with abstraction – a central tenet of Torres-García's constructive universalism – that enters the picture at this point, and forces our hand into exploring his theoretical writings in order to develop a configuration of legibility adequate to the image, without ever pretending to exhaust its opacity. To the contrary, the interval with language can add even more layers to the image, and make it visible in multiple ways, conferring upon it an infinite polysemy.

The pictogram of the sun in *The Inverted Map* is shorthand for Father Inti, the Inca sun god, while the moon pictogram, as part of Torres-García's personal repertoire of symbols, is a direct descendant of the Inca moon Goddess, Mama Quilla.⁴¹ Both pictograms upset the integrity of the grid, pervading it with transcendence, which, at least within the parameters of a Cartesian space without centres of meaning, constitutes an impossibility: the gods cannot be charted, only the visible can be quantified, located, measured. What upsets the spatial cohesion of the map is that it brings back time into the image: it is an image of decolonization in that the picto-ideographic intervention effects a coming together of geography and writing. The latter is a counter-writing without phonologocentric imperatives; it is a visual language that charges the territorial configuration with a narrative dimension, thereby composing a hybrid image bespeaking a desire to return to a time before the evacuation of the sacred from space. The hand-drawn lines encode a nostalgia for a mythical time prior to the disenchantment of mechanical, reproducible clock-time, and a return to the deep attunement of the earth to the movement of the sun:

While in Mesoamerican (as well as early Christian) cosmology, spatial orientation was determined by the sunrise and sunset, European cartography of the late Renaissance preferred North and South. The direction of the sun's movement and the sacred place were replaced by modern technology and the compass (Mignolo 1995, 304).

Perhaps, then, the notion of nostalgia is not quite adequate to describe the mood of the

⁴¹ In Chapter 3 (Part 3.2), I will examine Torres-García's *Inverted Map* as a reverberation of Santacruz Pachacuti Yamqui Salcamaygua's cosmological drawing of 1615, which accompanied his *Relación de antigüedades deste reyno del Perú*. This drawing maps Coricancha onto the Inca universe, and is a visual compression of Inca cosmology – the *Relación* is an imagetext that conjoins writing and imaging into a complex regime of visibility/legibility, where the boundary between writing and drawing has become indiscernible. The visual analogy between the *Inverted Map* and Yamqui Salcamaygua's drawing allows for a recalcitrant *mestizaje* to take on shape in counterpoint to the claims of Torres-García's manifesto "The School of the South." The latter's logical field disavows the actuality of admixture altogether by exalting the purity of the Amerindian paradigm of geometric abstraction to the detriment of the impurity of colonial styles, i.e., the decadence of a type of figuration in the service of representation and naturalism. This, I propose, is one of the instances in which Torres-García's doctrinal statements are immediately contradicted by his visual work. While the text speaks in the name of purity, the image – in this case the 1944 version of the *Inverted Map* (Figure 1.5) – presents a sensory field that 'speaks' in the name of a fundamental confusion of the conceptual and the sensory, the pre-Columbian and the post-Columbian. The image presents the pre-Columbian as the effect of the post-Columbian, following the complex history of inscription within Western canons of writing and depiction.

image. Or rather, a qualification of the idea of ‘nostalgia’ is called for.

To Map Nostalgia

In *The Future of Nostalgia* (2002), Svetlana Boym does just that. She addresses the intricate temporality of nostalgia, a term which, “(from *nostos*, return home, and *algia*, longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed” (Boym 2002, 12). Through constructive universalism, Torres-García creates the foundation of his longing, of a past (and future, so he hopes) home: ritual, authentic pre-Columbian abstract being. Nostalgia is a diagnosis, and constructive universalism, as humanist symptomatology, critiques the inhumanity of its epoch by offering an alternative image of the progress of history. Constructive universalism longs to divert the course of history to make art and life culminate in a ritual continuum that restores the integrity of a lost past (or rather, the fantasy of a missed origin) through the reactivation of Incaic cosmology.

Incidentally, Walter Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* can be read as a prolonged meditation on the baroque as a diagnostic of loss attendant on the Counter-Reformation and its aftereffects: “the only pleasure the melancholic permits himself, and it is a powerful one, is allegory” (Benjamin 1977, 185). Although concerned with loss, baroque allegory is a nostalgic, pleasurable form, since, as Boym puts it, “nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy” (2002, 12). Through a paradoxical excess of materiality and fragmentarity, epitomized in the corpse (Benjamin 1977, 217), European baroque allegory of the seventeenth century expresses the hope for wholeness - to transcend bodily death and a history that no longer assumes the “form of the process an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay” (ibid., 178) - in a world where the precise ‘contours’ of salvation are radically questioned. In a way, the baroque prefigures the receding of the artwork’s “aura” through the profanation of its production and increasing autonomization, which was a grave concern to a society having transitioned from a sacred cosmology to a profane cartography, with its contestations of the meaning of the Scriptures. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” Benjamin provides a number of interpretive keys to his elusive concept of “aura” that strongly resonate with

constructive universalism's art philosophy. A cipher for the artwork's "uniqueness" (Benjamin 2003, 256), aura's close association with ritual is especially significant given Torres-García's interpretation of constructive universalism as the resuscitation of pre-Columbian cosmology:

As we know, the earliest artworks originated in the service of rituals - first magical, then religious. And it is highly significant that the artwork's auratic mode of existence is never entirely severed from its ritual function. In other words: *the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the source of its original use value* (ibid., emphasis in original).⁴²

Torres-García's concern with ritual echoes Benjamin's remarks, and is borne out by the title of one of his paintings, *Grafismo mágico* (Figure 2.1). Reminiscent of the distancing of the auratic itself - "the unique apparition of a distance, however near it [the natural object] may be," the "religious scruple" of the European baroque received its full expression in the baroque, in a delayed reaction to the 'profanation' of the Renaissance. In addition, the baroque already bespeaks the impending evacuation of the artwork's aura, while simultaneously 'pre-coding' the impending flight of the "angel of history."⁴³

⁴² Furthermore, for Benjamin, politics has superseded the role of ritual as it pertains to art, as an immediate consequence of technological reproducibility. In fact, this dissociation of art from its ground in ritual is an act of emancipation: "for the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual" (Benjamin 2003, 256). Technology thus appears as a revolutionary, liberating agent in and of itself, making art political, since, "*as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics*" (ibid., 256-57; emphasis in original). Theodor Adorno will warn against the fetishization of the revolutionary potential of technology, and the underlying atavism that informs such equations (cf. Adorno in Bloch 1977, 124ff). Furthermore, Jacques Rancière deconstructs the dichotomy between politics and art, showing that aesthetics is inherently political, and that the 'politicization of art' is pleonastic; what matters is the redistribution of sensibilities as a way to engage in dissensus (cf. Rancière 2004). Incidentally, if we follow Benjamin's logic, it is as if constructive universalism works within an archaic 'pocket' of resistance, purposely resisting politicization by insisting on the handmade as *pars pro toto* for authenticity. Torres-García deems the political as fundamentally foreign to the purity of art; as such, both Benjamin and Torres-García share the same investment in the dichotomy between art and politics, although the former highlights the utopianism of "politicizing art" (Benjamin 2003, 270), as opposed to the fascism that ensues from an "aestheticizing of politics" (cf. ibid.). Torres-García on the other hand would instantiate the "theology of art" in his adherence to the sacred function of art - or at least the fantasy that one could regress back to a time before the irrevocable interruption of history through reproducibility (cf. ibid., 256).

⁴³ See my short discussion on "On the Concept of History" (Benjamin 2004, 389-411) in the introductory section to Chapter 1, "A Prelude on Mapping."

By its very essence classicism was not permitted to behold the lack of freedom, the imperfection, the collapse of the physical, beautiful, nature. But beneath its extravagant pomp, this is precisely what baroque allegory proclaims ... A deep-rooted intuition of the problematic character of art - it was by no means only the coyness of a particular social class, it was also a religious scruple which assigned artistic activity to the 'leisure hours' - emerges as a reaction to its self-confidence at the time of the Renaissance (Benjamin 1977, 176).

This "religious scruple" is a response to the progressive loss of the "aura" of the artwork, and encodes the experience of the auratic's progressive receding from history. Torres-García may have been a mournful allegorist (or rather, a Neo-Classical 'symbolist'), but he never permitted himself the pleasure of the baroque, of *mestizaje*, at least not in his writing. Nonetheless, he does share the same "religious scruple" in the face of the loss of aura by insisting on the cosmological import of his aesthetics. At the same time however, *The Inverted Map* superimposes the European onto the Indo-American, and by that token it partakes of a polemical neo-baroque sensibility geared towards the future. In that sense, that is to say, from the point of view of the visual aesthesis of the map rather than reading constructive universalism at its word, *The Inverted Map* refuses the nostalgic romance with the fantasy of an irrevocably lost "aura."⁴⁴

Indeed, as Boym rightly points out, the concept of nostalgia is ambiguous in its complex shuffling of past, present and the anticipation of a future. Nostalgia is not merely concerned with reviving an imaginary past; it does so with an eye to the future. "Nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension" (Boym 2002, 12), and it is with respect to how it envisions the relation between past and present that nostalgia is either "restorative" or "reflective."

Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming-

⁴⁴ I am anticipating my discussion of the re-appropriation of the colonial baroque by antropofagia. My argument revolves around the general economy of superimposition antropofagia sets up in its creation of a new baroque - a New World neo-baroque - "fold" (Deleuze 1993). In my discussion of antropofagia in Chapter 5, I will be relying on Severo Sarduy's main point that the counter-colonial, neo-baroque aesthetic employs the tactic of radical visual superimposition and citationality (Sarduy 1989). In addition, the notion of baroque superposition should be kept firmly in mind when I return to *The Inverted Map* in Chapter 3 (Section 3.1), where I will demonstrate how the map is a patchwork of visibilities and legibilities of the past working itself through into the present rather than an image of a nostalgic longing for one's romantic fantasy of a past - including the fantasy of a lost 'aura.'

wistfully, ironically, desperately. Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt (Boym 2002, 18).

The remainder of this section will make palpable how *The Inverted Map* can be perceived in terms of a reflective, ambiguous nostalgia, in its parodic implications (I will return to this aspect in Chapter 3). However, it must again be emphasized that my interpretation of the image works from a different regime of legibility than that of constructive universalism as it formulates its tenets in its programmatic texts. The latter evince a restorative nostalgia predicated on noetic truth that corresponds with its rhetoric of purity and the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis.

As giving shape to the ‘future of nostalgia,’⁴⁵ Torres-García’s drawing holds out the utopia of the coexistence of the compass and the movement of the sun, thus forming an emblem for the coming of abstract, primitive man, and the reconnection with a pre-modern tradition of geometry: “the Indian was a geometer” (Torres-García 1992, 80). This ambivalence between past and future, between nostalgia and hope, between the picto-ideographic spontaneity of the Amerindian and the alphabetical rigidity of the European is at play within the visual logic of the *Inverted Map*, a logic that through the infusion of time imbues the map within a minimum of narrativity, and instills a moment of reflection within its nostalgic economy. The picto-ideographic movement of the earth – the arrow leading toward Padre Inti – counters the alphabetic sequentiality of reading. The movement towards the sun is the direction guiding the rotation of the earth, bound in a perpetual motion to the east (the inverted west). The figure of the South (the anti-North) is in constant proximity to the pictograph of the sun God, ensuring that America is the continent of Inti’s perpetual rising, as the space where the sun never sets, in counterpoint

⁴⁵ In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym points to the imperialist origin of the term nostalgia, “coined by the ambitious Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in his medical dissertation in 1688. He believed that it was possible ‘from the force of the sound Nostalgia to define the sad mood originating from the desire for return to one’s native land.’ ... Contrary to our intuition, nostalgia came from medicine, not from poetry or politics” (Boym 2002, 24). Through colonization, and the displacement of Europeans to the New World, this ‘hegemonic’ sickness became a veritable epidemic (cf. Boym 2002, 26ff).

to the west, perpetually enshrined in darkness, living off the reflected, borrowed light of Inti. Following Torres-García's logic, this 'borrowed light' has recently become manifest, or rather, has been *revealed*, to Europe under the guise of the avant-garde's discovery of abstraction, which had always already been in place in pre-Columbian America, prior to the Fall of figuration, the contamination of the purity of planar abstraction inaugurated by European colonization and the subsequent process of creolization.

Resemblance and contiguity – the moment of pointing out the 'there' on the map from the 'here' of enunciation and viewing – are at work in the space of the map. The hand-drawn, the traits, the marks, the swirls of the line, the hesitations: the non-semiotic traces insinuate themselves within the idiom of geometric projection. The map encompasses a sensory field that reshapes a conceptual charting. 'Resemblance' is highly unstable, informing and deforming the map's regime of legibility – and vice versa. The tension between reading and viewing, between word and image, is thus already at work on a very basic level. As we move to read 'the movement of the earth,' the "movimiento de la tierra" as we must, from west to east, we thus engage in something unnatural, something at odds with the depicted, 'real' movement of the earth. The arrow-icon is expressly oriented *against* the movement of the reading eye: we must move against the alphabet to make the image intelligible in its disorientation. The contingency of the gesture of upturning the shape of a continent – which might seem just a frivolity – is endowed with a certain necessity, even if it is the minimal imposition of the necessity of reading an overturned world, of a visual disorientation, through the strict orientation of Western alphabetic writing, with its laws of reading from left to right, up to down. The drawing frames the inversion as a moment of permanence in its refusal to upturn the alphabet and thereby insisting on the tension between reading and viewing, between the logical field and the sensory field.⁴⁶ That the words are right-side-up suggest that this inversion has the force of history, of a tradition – a rather literal *counter*-tradition moving against the grain of history. What the image seems to say through the hinting of the

⁴⁶ Throughout this study, I will use the term 'logical field' in counterpoint to Lyotard's notion of the "sensory field" (2011) as a way to address the propositional content of discourse, in its claims to discursive knowledge. This 'logical field' is always interrupted by the 'visual' "thickness" (Lyotard 2011, 24ff) discourse carries within itself. I will return to this distinction below.

arrow-icon is that there is a counter-tradition that moves with the earth, a tradition following the “movimiento de la tierra” contradicting the movement of the alphabetical eye. The articulable and the visible intertwine unevenly and interrupt the smooth flow of intelligibility. The operations of inversion, reversion and counter-movement consolidate a vertiginous legibility, a widening of horizons, suggesting a different regime of cartographic – visual – literacy. The drawing simultaneously deflates and reinstates the grid; it makes the grid look futile, out of place, and foolish, as if, even after the world is upended and all the points of the compass have been inverted, at least we know exactly what ‘correct’ point in space we occupy. The map charges science with the force of the cosmological. The Cartesian space-time coordinates of a un-inverted here-now appear useless in orienting us toward a future past (or past future), towards a meaningful engagement with a topsy-turvy world where the future is a movement backwards in time, against the day, reconnecting us with the primordial origins of Abstract Man. The hand-drawn ‘deformation’ of cartographic precision removes the pragmatics of ‘applied science’ and makes it complicit with an image of the sacred; geometry is re-enchanted.

Yet, at the same time, the gridlines provide a basis of legibility as they gesture toward a colonial, cartographic history of inscriptions and the subsumption of ‘America’ within a Cartesian world picture and therefore harbour a self-critical potential. The map and the world it encloses seem to move in two directions at the same time, making the earth halt in an indeterminate zone somewhere between nostalgia and utopia: reflective nostalgia. Torres-García’s map is a mix of past, present and (im)possible futures. The drawing superimposes spaces and temporalities, composing an image that ‘speaks’ a productive, reflective nostalgia. As a “symptom of our age, a historical emotion, coeval with modernity itself,” Boym writes that “nostalgia is not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that made the division into ‘local’ and ‘universal’ possible” (2002, 15). The *Inverted Map* traces a resistant nostalgia by offering an image of the future by going back to the artisanal drawing table and the hand. The image rebels against the mechanization of space-time and the idea of the global to eke out a space where the pre-Columbian, pre-modern cosmology is superimposed onto the modern world picture, and vice versa, where the artisan meets the high-tech mapmaker.

In defiance, the earth rotates against time, against the movement of alphabetical time, the time of the voice and the sequencing of sounds in arbitrary, non-telluric formations; the future is a progression backwards towards the first rising of the sun, in a movement that unfolds towards the origin of time, located in a precise point: S 34° 41' W 56°, Montevideo. The map records the moment of origin, the *omphalos* of the world, the navel of the earth, paradoxically determined with absolute precision in a Cartesian coordinate: the *Inverted Map* is thus a cosmic-cartographic composite. The most modern is the most ancient; space and time convene in this one single point of origin, a point where new memories will originate following the establishment of constructive universalism. Montevideo is the 'New Cusco,' the new *omphalos* – the new 'navel of the world' as the Incas considered their capital – of a South American renaissance rooted in Amerindian abstraction, the old *axis mundi* transplanted to Montevideo. It is here that a new art will arise, it is here that an absolute beginning, a new childhood of humanity, overcoming the *Untergang des Abendlandes* will emerge.⁴⁷ This, at least, is Torres-García's utopian projection, his prophesy informing his messianic fervour – an impossible hope, yet to which he clings all the more because it runs against his own better judgment.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ In *Latin American Vanguard: The Art of Contentious Encounters* (1994), Vicky Unruh notes the "importance of European and North American thinkers with New World concerns" for artists trying to formulate an aesthetics expressive of South American specificity, regional identity, so as to effects artistic independence from the hegemonic centre and counter the image of the South as merely a paltry imitation of a grand, authentic original. In order to further legitimate avant-garde undertakings while grounding this praxis in terms of national identity, artists in the South were drawn to the thought of Oswald Spengler's (1918-22) *The Decline of the West*, and in his wake "Count Hermann Keyserling (*Meditaciones suramericanas*, 1933); José Ortega y Gasset (in particular, 'Carta a un joven argentino que estudió filosofía,' 1924, 'Hegel y América,' 1928, and 'La pampa... promesas,' 1929); and Waldo Frank (*The Rediscovery of America*, 1929). In addition, Ortega's journal *Revista de Occidente* circulated widely in Latin America and played a critical role in the disseminating of Spengler's ideas about the future significance of non-European cultures" (Unruh 1994, 127). The Brazilian *antropofagia* movement was equally enthralled by this European, Hegelian image of a future located in the South (see Chapter 5 and 6).

⁴⁸ Juan Fló (1992) points out the 'manic depressive' mood swings of Torres-García's messianic complex. In the first years after his return to Montevideo, Torres-García's writing evinces a boundless faith in the possibility of realizing the utopia of a new, ritual society grounded in the Indo-American tradition of abstraction, as put forward in the doctrine of constructive universalism. The initial resistance and lack of (official) support he encounters is interpreted as the sign, the confirmation of the truthfulness of his glad tidings. This is closely related to his Neo-Platonic stance, in which possibility always prevails over the actual. Despite the help of his disciples at the Association of Constructive Art, and the Taller Torres-García after it, Torres grows increasingly disenchanted with the 'backwardness' of the Uruguayan audience, who

The Inverted Map as Counter-Space

In its composite nature, the *Inverted Map* overlays the two models of haecceity - of 'thisness,' of what grants something (a body, for instance) its irreducible specificity - Deleuze and Guattari explicate in *A Thousand Plateaus*. On the one hand, Torres-García's map, in its simulation of the scientific, Cartesian, cartographic regime as well its reliance on the alphabetical eye, operates the space of an "assemblage haecceity" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 262) in which "a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude" (ibid., 260) - a substance individuated through cartographic co-ordinates, through the position it takes up in "empty, homogeneous" (Benjamin), quantifiable space. On the other hand, as Deleuze and Guattari maintain, "there is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance" (ibid., 261): this is true haecceity, i.e., interassemblage haecceity (ibid., 262), "the *milieu* of intersection of the longitudes and latitudes" (ibid., 263; my emphasis). It is the irreducibility of "a season, a winter, a summer, an hour" (ibid., 261): "You have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, a *life* (regardless of its duration)—a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack (regardless of its regularity)" (ibid., 262; emphasis in original). It is the space of the movement of the earth and all that it implies: the movement of the sun, the rhythm of night and day and the seasons, lived, and living time. Torres-García's *Inverted Map* superimposes cartography and cosmological space into an indeterminate configuration, showing how both regimes of legibility and visibility are intertwined to the point of indiscernibility:⁴⁹ assemblage and interassemblage haecceities are "strictly inseparable" (263).

seem blind to the potential of the project and are content in their lack of cosmopolitanism, in their indifference to the need for an autochthonous avant-garde. Declaring constructive universalism dead by 1940, Torres-García nonetheless remains convinced of its urgency. He takes it that the general public was simply not yet prepared to discern the truth of constructive universalism and the artist thus resigns himself to this fate.

⁴⁹ In *What is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guattari characterize "zone of indiscernibility" as the space where distinctions pass through, so as to effect a becoming-other, a self-differentiating move that makes

From this perspective, the *Inverted Map*, produces, by virtue of its gesture of inversion and its freehand character, a “counter-space” (Lefebvre 1991, 367) of alternate, paradoxical cartographic-cosmological signification where the space of assemblage and interassemblage haecceity stand in productive tension.⁵⁰ It is in the “counter-space” of the *Inverted Map* that nostalgia and utopia meet, as Lefebvre characterizes counter-space as a “utopian alternative to actually existing ‘real’ space” (1991, 349), a space “in opposition to the one embodied in the strategies of power” (ibid., 381). In addition, the concept of Thirdspace can shed some additional light on Torres-García’s *Inverted Map*. Influenced by Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1991), Edward W. Soja develops a “Trialectics of Spatiality” (1996, 53-82) in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Thirdspace arises “from the sympathetic deconstruction and heuristic reconstruction of the Firstspace-Secondspace duality” (Soja 1996, 81). Soja defines Firstspace as “perceived space,” with an epistemology “fixed mainly on the concrete materiality of spatial forms, on things that can be empirically mapped” (10), while Secondspace refers to represented space, i.e., “the ideological content of codes, theories, and the conceptual depictions of space linked to production relations” (189), the “thoughtful re-presentations of human spatiality in mental or cognitive forms” (10). Thirdspace results from the “‘thirling’ of the spatial imagination,” which involves “the creation of another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism” (10). Torres-García’s map is the imaginative reconstruction of this duality, which gives rise to an unexpected

distinctions enter into closer proximity. “It is a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility, *as if* things, beasts, and persons endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation. ... Painting needs the power of a ground that can dissolve forms and impose the existence of a zone in which we no longer know which is animal and which human, because something like the triumph or monument of their non-distinction rises up” (1994, 206; my emphasis). The *before*, the *prior*, does not concern an origin out of which differentiation arises, but refers to a process, to an oscillation. The analogical *as if* signals difference and similitude. Indiscernibility is not the temporal regression to an ultimate origin of primordial unity. Rather, it concerns the tracing of an area of attraction and mobility. On my reading, indiscernibility names a mapping of virtualities, of possibilities of readings and viewings where divergent legibilities and visibilities grind against one another.

⁵⁰ For more on the cosmological connotations of the map, see Chapter 3.

“heterotopia,” a “different space” (cf. Foucault 1998, 175-185). The map charts the possibility of making the world newly legible and visible through tracing a space which questions “all other real and imagined spaces simultaneously” (Soja 1996, 69). It maps a world – an understanding of being – where different objects and practices become conceivable – a world filled with revered artifacts that bespeak the reign of ‘Abstract Man,’ a map not concerned with outlining trade routes, (tourist) destinations, the mapping of resources or commodification in general. As such, the map departs from a different representational regime where cosmology has re-insinuated itself to modify the ‘usual’ cartographic projections.⁵¹ Constructive universalism’s map makes visible a contestatory image of space animated by Torres-García’s reflective nostalgia (Boym) for an impossible future.

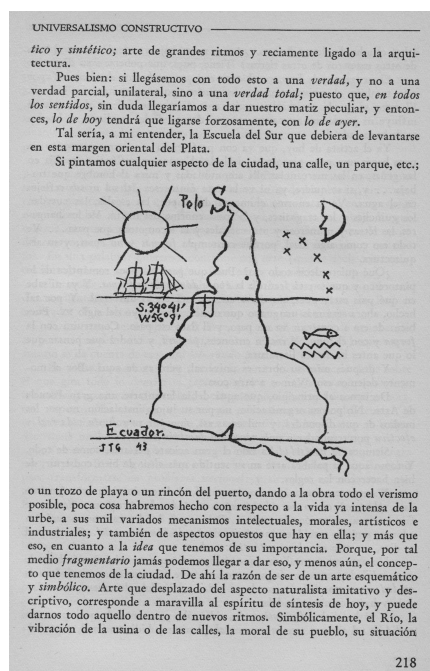


Figure 1.6 Joaquín Torres-García, *Inverted Map of the South*. [Page reproduced from Joaquín Torres-García, *Universalismo constructivo: Contribución a la unificación del arte y la cultura de América* (Buenos Aires: Poseidón, 1944), 218].

⁵¹ These remarks are only preliminary and are not meant to fully engage with the complexities of the theoretical models of either Lefebvre or Soja. They are merely tentative steps for a further investigation of how constructive universalism, and South American (artistic) praxis at large, gives rise to Thirdspaces in counterpoint to the hegemonic cartographic imaginary. For another source that might prove essential in rethinking spatiality, see Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

The second version of the map, the one reproduced in 1944 in Torres-García's book *Universalismo constructivo: Contribución a la unificación del arte y la cultura de América* accompanying "Lesson 30: The School of the South" (figure 1.6), seems to lack the complex interrelation between differing modes of visibility and legibility. What seems missing is the pronounced tension between the cartographic emptying of space through the indifferent grid with its pinpoint accuracy (the space of assemblage haecceity) and the counter-force of a 'sloppy,' hand-drawn, cosmological pictographic realm running against the phonological regime but in concert with a conception of space-time encompassing the movement of the earth and sun, narrative and history (the space of interassemblage haecceity).

The cartographic grid has been reduced to two horizontal lines. Or rather, the grid-figure has been effectively evacuated from the image, with only two lines attesting to its former presence, while the intrusion of alphabetical text is kept to a minimum. The *omphalos*, Montevideo, is still indicated by S 34° 41' W 56° 9'. 'Uprooted' as they are from their 'natural habitat' however – i.e., the quantifying Cartesian cartographic grid that maps extended matter and gives it its position, making it measurable as just one random point always in reference to the 'origin', the (0,0) of which every other coordinate is but a mere function – the numbers 34 41 and 56 9 appear to be autonomous, as if some inherent meaning can be read off their sequence, as if it is code for a secret message, a message of great cosmological import.⁵² The numbers turn into cyphers, into hermetic symbols, turning the map into an enigmatic, hybrid 'Cartesian numerology.' Whereas each number points to measurability, quantifiability and positionality within an overall configuration, here the numbers take on a certain hermetic aura, a quality

⁵² Torres-García was conversant with Pythagorean numerology, as well as freemasonry, alchemy, medieval mysticism, and a whole amalgam of other esoteric, hermetic traditions in which numbers had inherent mystical meaning, as opposed to the rational, Cartesian idea of the number as carrier of quantity only (cf. Duncan 1974). Torres-García's reliance on the hermetic tradition and esoteric doctrines should be read in the context of the disappearance of "auratic art" (Benjamin, cf. supra). In fact, constructive universalism's simulation of ancient codes must be seen as the diagnosis, through nostalgia (cf. Boym), and as a resistance against the disappearance of aura. Torres-García is intent on reinstating a "religious scruple" (Benjamin 1977, 176) by installing "the unique apparition of a distance" (Benjamin 2003, 256) by means of the cryptic. To a certain extent, the image becomes 'unavailable' to the viewer, who is confronted with a set of cyphers that resist the 'profanation' of modern interpretation. For a more comprehensive overview of constructive universalism's esoterism, see Adolfo M. Maslach, "On the Esoteric in the Art of Joaquín Torres-García" (in Fletcher 1992, 149-164).

intensified via Montevideo's visual proximity to the cross, the cross that pinpoints the *omphalos*, the *axis mundi* on the map, enclosed within a J-like form that rudimentary marks off Uruguay's boundary line. It is as if S 34° 41' W 56° 9' should be read as the new origin of the Cartesian coordinate system, with the Greek cross – dividing the world again in its four parts – indicating the point zero where the horizontal and vertical axes converge. It marks the precise point of the *axis mundi* giving birth – centrifugally – to the world itself, the point where the earth sprouts forth and unfolds itself in every direction. The corners of the world, the four directions of the compass, tie together in this cosmological knot. It is a birth-scar attesting to the motif of the migration of Cusco to Montevideo, as well as invoking colonial history and the Western scriptural-cartographic regimes in place upon the discovery and conquest of America.⁵³

1.3 Constructive Universalism and the Artifice of Arkhétectonics

The two *Inverted Maps* put both empty, dead space and living, cosmological space in a relation of cohabitation. Geometric space is sacralised; its profanity is modulated through allusions to a pre-Columbian matrix as well as echoes of pre-Modern Europe.

Constructive universalism produces this paradigm to legitimate its own art praxis by invoking the authority of tradition. It grounds geometry in a mythical past that had been overturned through industrialization and colonization, with the latter introducing, in Torres-García's (1992, 74) own terms, the "decadence of naturalism" that perverted the purity of the Amerindian "abstract spirit." In his book *Estructura* of 1935 for instance, "Torres-García praised prehistoric art, condemned imitative figurative art, and classified Renaissance painting as decadent" (Buzio de Torres 1992, 12). Torres-García was intent on reawakening a non-instrumental, telluric sense of geometry, through a science of space and proportion not in opposition to the sacred but as a means to re-enchanted

⁵³ In fact, the Inca capital of Cusco – and by extension the entire Inca realm – was divided in four parts, all of which had sacred meaning. In addition, the quadripartite motif is also a rudimentary element in the carving up of the world in Western European geography. See Chapter 3, section 3.1 for a more detailed discussion on the quadripartite division.

nature.⁵⁴ This turn toward the archaic, this regression into the past as an approximation of truth, can be read as the logical consequence, as the most rigorous exploration of the avant-garde desire for a future that would have reintegrated art with life, infusing nature with art to the point that it restores everyday life into a holistic, ritual continuum of experience.

It seems that on this point constructive universalism exemplifies – at least as far as its programmatic texts are concerned – Peter Bürger’s thesis in *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984) that the avant-garde was driven by the utopian impulse to subsume art within the general praxis of life, thereby hoping to dissolve itself as an autonomous, institutionally sanctioned sphere of activity. As Bürger formulates it, “the avant-garde intends the abolition of autonomous art by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life” (Bürger 1984, 54). The autonomy and institutionalization of art into a separate, ‘de-worlded’ discipline was construed as a fateful diremption from the socius, which art was at pains to mend. It located the origin of the ‘parting of ways’ of the social, the political and the aesthetic within the enlightenment, industrialization, and consumer capitalism. As such, the avant-garde can be seen as the continuation and radicalization of Romantic nostalgia for subversive contestation, while simultaneously thematizing the loss of legitimacy. On this reading, the genre of the manifesto becomes legible as both the diagnosis and response to art’s autonomization.⁵⁵ The manifesto is the theatricalization of a position of authority; it is the expression of a powerlessness and lack of legitimacy it desires to overcome through performance.⁵⁶ This was exacerbated in

⁵⁴ For in-depth analyses of the problematic of art, disenchantment and re-enchantment, see the essay collection edited by James Elkins and David Morgan, *Re-Enchantment* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁵⁵ I am of course giving an over-simplified sketch of a much more complicated historical dynamic. This work is not primarily concerned with mapping the relation between modernism and post-modernism and does not claim to give an in-depth historical account of processes of modernization in relation to the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde. Instead, I am focusing on the mutations of legibility and visibility within specific art works so as to reveal the diagrammatology of aesthesis (see Chapter 4 and the Introduction).

⁵⁶ The intricate relation between theatricality and performativity is examined in detail in Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). For more on the crisis of legitimacy that marked the very beginning of the avant-garde (i.e., Futurism) with a genealogy reaching all the way back to the Renaissance, see Chapter 2 “Strategies of Legitimation: The Manifesto from Politics to Aesthetics” in, Luca Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist:*

the post-modern “crisis of art,” the “crisis of legitimacy” haunting contemporary art, as signalled by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984).⁵⁷

Torres-García’s Anti-Aesthetics: The Reification of Spirit through the Rhetoric of Purity

Upon his return to Montevideo, Torres-García was faced with an additional problem of legitimacy: how to justify a new, abstract art in South America? In order to claim authority and authenticity for his praxis, constructive universalism increasingly turned toward the pre-Columbian as a means to present historical continuity. Keeping Bürger’s perspective in mind, Torres-García’s constructive universalism can be interpreted as the logical culmination of the melancholy mood constitutive of the avant-garde: by a regression to the origin of ‘geometric thought’ – as especially legible in Inca culture and its spirit of abstraction – this primordial oneness would be salvaged. It would be restored in a future art of the South in which geometric abstraction would act as central paradigm in the construction of a new world, in a new understanding of being, thereby resolving the crisis of legitimacy. This new world would also be the oldest, the purest, the truest, i.e., it would be the cosmos of primordial ‘Abstract Man’ for whom geometry was still the expression of sacred relations and had ritual, cosmic significance.⁵⁸

Manifesto Writing and European Modernism, 1885-1915 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 29-92.

⁵⁷ For a succinct explanation of Lyotard’s notion of the “crisis of legitimacy” as it pertains to postmodernism, see Braembussche 2009, 252-54.

⁵⁸ As previously noted at the beginning of Section 1.2, Torres-García’s attitude to technology was ambivalent, to put it mildly. His nostalgic utopia was at odds with the dominant ideology of modernity itself, the most extreme formulation of which was Futurism’s machinolatry, which was nonetheless also propelled by the same dream of ‘re-socialization’ of art, of making culture and nature coincide. By contrast, Torres-García’s image of the future was decidedly atavistic. As such, his utopianism contrasts sharply with the exaltation of the ‘techno-barbarian’ by the Brazilian *antropofagia* movement. The latter was perhaps overinvested in the positivist ideology of *Ordem e Progresso* that went hand in hand with the movement’s more nationalistic orientation, as opposed to Torres-García universalist cosmopolitanism. For more on the nationalist ideology informing antropofagia, see Chapter 5. For a reading of a Torres-García’s ‘idealist cosmopolitanism,’ see Chapter 3 (section 3.2). For a more extensive analysis of constructive universalism’s unease with mechanization, as well the unexpected avant-gardism that results from it, see Chapter 2

Torres-García recognized this sacred geometry in pre-Columbian culture, and Inca civilization in particular, which, in the words of César Paternosto (1996, 9)

was a rational, geometric empire. Rational, but not in an Aristotelian sense, and geometric, but decidedly non-Euclidean. Cuzco, the sacred capital of the Incas, was of mythical origin, and its every position and direction was endowed with ‘a particular accent,’ as Ernst Cassirer puts it, a return ‘to the fundamental mythical accent, the division between the sacred and the profane.’ This geometry manifestly differs from Euclidean space, in which a homogeneity without any inflection whatsoever prevails.

It must be kept in mind however that this alignment of avant-garde abstract geometric art with geometry of a cosmological Andean ‘accent,’ patched together in the idiosyncratic doctrine of constructive universalism, was not the product of a sudden epiphany, but of a recognition long in preparation, a recognition that was the effect of intense labour. It was a ‘station’ in an endless, unfinished process of divining visual analogies between an (idealized) image of a past and an artistic praxis in the here-now of the South. Paris, “the cradle of twentieth-century vanguard art in general, and modernist Primitivism in particular” (Rubin 1984, xi) is the place where Torres-García became an apprentice in primitivism and geometric abstraction alike. Grounded in esoteric theosophy, Mondriaan’s Neo-Plasticism in particular – in its attempt to restore the spiritual dimension to geometry – resounded with Torres-García’s envisioning of a new modern classicism of synthetic abstraction with mystical overtones. Constructive universalism’s rapprochement with De Stijl, Neo-Plasticism and Elementarism, Torres-García’s close contact with Mondriaan, Theo van Doesburg, Georges Vantongerloo, Jean Hélion, Michel Seuphor and others working within the paradigm of abstraction as well as his spearheading the broad but short-lived *Cercle et Carré* project (which accommodated geometric as well as non-geometric abstraction), in a sense attuned Torres-García’s eye to a new visibility. This visibility was informed by a regime of legibility in which geometric forms, lines, orthogonals and patterns were read in terms of spiritual

expressivity, as manifesting the inherent ‘inflection’ of spatiality. This ‘non-Euclidean,’ sacred sense of space – making room for the ‘accent’ space comes with, its ‘predisposition’ so to speak, as opposed to the conceptualization of space as empty container – was superimposed onto another paradigm, i.e., primitivism. Torres-García became a primitivist in Paris, and not after his return to Montevideo. This further attests to the complex routes to roots, of the constructedness of the idea – as image (*eikon*) as well as conceptual infrastructure (*eidōs*) that anchors the truth of this image – of the primordial.

Furthermore, as Margit Rowell points out, Torres-García’s “understanding of ‘primitivism’ was not particularly original and more or less specific to the period. Comparable interpretations are found in Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro’s *Primitive Negro Sculpture* (1926) and Georges Henri Luquet’s *L’Art primitif* (1930)” (Rowell 2009, 119). The origin is thus never absolutely ‘original’: what he discerned in the Amerindian artefacts on display at the *Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro* (soon to be relocated to the present-day *Musée de l’Homme*) – that almost mythical place of origin imbuing Picasso with his own primitivist sensibility. The museum was an eclectic *Wunderkammer* filled to the nook with colonial artefacts, the spoils of civilization and missionary zeal, housing a collection of ‘idolatrous’ images kept at a safe distance from the ‘pagan’ places of origin.⁵⁹ It was here that Torres-García encountered “the early stages of cultural development, which he saw as representing the childhood of man and mankind; their spontaneous expression based on intuition, their manner of capturing an abstract geometry in nature, and their rudimentary abstract style” (Rowell 2009, 119).⁶⁰ This geometric sensibility is also what he saw instantiated in the 1928 show “Les Arts anciens de l’Amérique,” “the first major exhibition ever organized devoted to the ancient

⁵⁹ For an imaginative account of the *Wunderkammer*, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 28-39.

⁶⁰ For additional clues on the importance of the *Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro* in the development of the historical European avant-garde, and specifically Torres-García’s formulation of constructive universalism and the pre-Columbian paradigm that subtends it, thereby creating an ‘ethnographic abstraction,’ see my remarks in Section 1.1.

arts of the Americas, mounted at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs” (Rowell 2009, 122).⁶¹ Labour, research, experimentation, the tracing of visual analogies and grounding them – making them legible – through a system of concepts lies at the roots of the formulation of a theory that Torres-García would consolidate, after his return ‘home,’ into the paradigm for his “School of the South.” Archaic abstraction, as the regime of legibility/visibility emerging from the interface of the historical avant-garde’s geometric abstraction with primitivism, is what which Torres-García imports to Montevideo (and South America in general), under the name of constructive universalism. In short, constructive universalism is “border gnosis” (Mignolo 2000).⁶² By taking and superimposing fragments from the contemporary hegemonic cultural centre, Torres-García reads the Andean ‘accent’ back into a new practice: his own work is made legible as the anticipation of a renaissance of primordial abstraction. “It is Torres who explained primitive art to us, and not the other way round,” is how Juan Fló (1992, 30) describes it. I would go one step further: it is Torres-García who produced primitive art in co-production with his own work, with the

⁶¹ Valery Fletcher (1992, 103-126) provides additional details that point to a certain vogue for Amerindian artefacts in Paris. Significantly, the Trocadéro housed a life-size replica of the Tihuanaco *Gate of the Sun* (in present-day Bolivia), whose stone carvings influenced the development of *grafismo* (Fletcher 1992, 111-112). In addition, the museum contained Nazca pottery, Peruvian textiles, Olmec masks of pre-Hispanic Mexico, and so forth (ibid., 111). The 1928 exhibition, which put on display “more than a thousand objects” (ibid.), was accompanied by a catalogue edited by Raoul D’Arcourt and Alfred Métraux, which made its way into Torres-García’s library in Montevideo (ibid., 127 n14). In addition, “a related publication, *L’Art précolombien* (Paris: Les Beaux-Arts, 1928), included photographs of masks, temples, and other artifacts along with essays by prominent French ethnologists such as ‘L’Amérique disparue’ by Georges Bataille and ‘Ce qui reste des grandes civilisations de l’Amérique’ by Alfred Métraux. That same year Adolphe Basler and Ernest Brummer published *L’Art précolombien* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1928), based on the collections at the Musée d’Ethnologie du Trocadéro” (ibid.). These sources were available to Torres-García for the creation of constructive universalism’s ethnographic abstraction.

⁶² As Walter Mignolo points out in *Local Histories/Global Designs*, he uses the quaint term *gnosis* as way to destabilize the colonality of the hegemonic term ‘epistemology’ with its Western scriptural economy. It is “knowledge otherwise,” also because it has the potential to “open up the notion of ‘knowledge’ beyond cultures of scholarships” (Mignolo 2000, 9). Border gnosis is defined as “knowledge from a subaltern perspective ... conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system” (ibid., 11) Border gnoseology is “a discourse about colonial knowledge ... at the conflictive intersection of the knowledge produced from the perspective of modern colonialisms (rhetoric, philosophy, science) and knowledge produced from the perspective of colonial modernities in Asia, Africa, and the Americas/Caribbean. Border gnoseology is a critical reflection on knowledge production from both the interior borders of the modern/colonial world system (imperial conflicts, hegemonic languages, directionality of translations, etc.) and its exterior borders (imperial conflicts with cultures being colonized, as well as the subsequent stages of independence or decolonization)” (ibid.). For a critique of the fetishization of the border as static given, see Chapter 6, Section 6.3 “The Erudition of the ‘Permanent Contradiction’: The Manifesto Antropófago.” There I discuss Mignolo’s inflexible image of the border through the deterritorializing power of antropofagia, which question the outside/inside binary through neo-baroque hyper-folding.

latter as a form of ethnographic abstraction. Moreover, it is the *alignment* that is the work of art; the coordination of the pre-contact Andean work with a contemporary practice reveals the pre-Columbian as constructive universalism's object of desire – the 'accent' is artifice.⁶³ The artificiality of the origin is further heightened when taking into account that notwithstanding

Torres-García's enduring passion for preconquest American archeology, and in particular for that of the Andes, he never visited the regions that so deeply inspired him. The sites would play a crucial role in the development of his aesthetic theories and practice, in particular the pre-Inca and Inca complexes that appealed to him for their primitive geometry and spiritual significance. Rather than travelling far afield, however, he immersed himself in the wealth of the collections and the documentation at the Trocadéro museum, which provided the visual material he needed (Rowell 2009, 126).

Even after his return to Montevideo in 1934 however, "he never visited the archaeological sites" (ibid. 2009, 128). Photographic documentation, the study of artefacts, and the literature on the primitive as well as Andean antiquity constituted his access to the authentic, to the primordial expression of abstract spirit.⁶⁴ To say that Torres-García was intimately acquainted with the 'spirit' of the works, rather than with their merely 'superficial' appearance is to miss the point. It is not because his knowledge

⁶³ That the pre-Columbian was an artificial co-creation of constructive universalism's ethnographic abstraction was a truth Torres-García could not accommodate in his system. Instead, the pre-Columbian is invariably posited as a natural origin. However, the process by which constructive universalism arrived at this natural origin is anything but in keeping with the 'rhetoric of purity' (cf. Cheetham 1991) it wishes to uphold. In the following sections of this chapter, I will pay closer attention to the 'patchwork aesthetics' of ethnographic abstraction and its disavowed tactic of superposition. The picture that will emerge is of a baroque *modus operandi* in counterpoint to the logical claims of originary purity. To condense and anticipate the discussion that will follow, what must be stressed is that the purity of the paradigmatic Indo-American geometer-artist stands in sharp contrast to its manufacture through an avant-garde collage 'means of production.' Informed by the anarchic potential of visual analogy, Torres-García was able to produce his ideal figure of the primordial, whose 'spirit' is what he sets out to revive; a true Renaissance in the South is the revival of the 'geometric spirit.' However, the materiality of the construct, as it is the effect of juxtapositions, is what makes such idealization possible: the sensuality of labour – the "sensory field" (Lyotard 2011) – which is the precondition for the idealized universal is subsequently repressed in the writing of his theory but is all the more visible in his art works. Torres-García's notebooks – with their collage of photos and handwriting – are testimony to the material conditions of the production of 'Abstract Man,' while his published art philosophical work conspires to keep the traces of materiality and visual analogy under wraps in favour of a Neo-classical eidetic edifice informed by a "rhetoric of purity" (cf. Cheetham).

⁶⁴ See my comments on the Trocadéro Museum in Section 1.1 of this chapter in connection with 'ethnographic abstraction,' as well as the Conclusion.

of the preconquest cultures was located on a ‘deeper,’ ideational rather than sensory level that guarantees the truth of his appropriations, since, supposedly, it “was the idea and not the objecthood, the abstract and not the physical encounter, of a given model that gave him the cues he needed to create his own abstract language” (Rowell 2009, 128). This merely amounts to replicating the “rhetoric of purity” (Cheetham 1991) inherent in constructive universalism’s theory, as well as in the claims of abstraction in general insofar as the latter adhere to the ideology of purity.

Moreover, it is the rhetoric of purity that obstructs the experience of the spirit of the artwork through its reification as something ‘over and above’ the image. As Theodor Adorno reminds us in *Aesthetic Theory*, the appearance of the artwork is not ‘superficial:’ it is the interval where the work of art manifests itself in its non-identity with itself. The artwork encompasses its own self-difference: it appears as meaningful, yet the source of this meaning cannot be exhausted by the materiality of the work, nor by the idea it gives expression to. In this enigmatic caesura, the artwork has always-already transcended its mere givenness as a thing, as an object. The work’s appearing, its aesthetic insistence on the sensory and the affective, is from the outset already more than a ‘mere,’ ‘brute’ ‘immediate’ (non-mediated), sensory, affective, “blind appearance” (Adorno 1997, 86). This excess that the artwork holds within itself so as to release it beyond its frame is spirit: “That through which artworks, by becoming appearance, are more than they are: This is their spirit. The determination of artworks by spirit is akin to their determination as phenomenon, as something that appears, and not as blind appearance” (Adorno 1997, 86). Spirit is the locus of legibility making artworks appear with a specific inflection; pure visibility is a fantasy. Legibility is what saturates the artwork in advance with a ‘disposition’ we respond to: legibility and visibility are indissociable, since “all discursive ingredients are material like colors and tones” (ibid., 87). However, the relation between legibility and visibility is not seamless: the work of art takes place in the gap, the interval between the sensory and thought. This is art’s critical site, which is immanent to its being *qua* appearance, as what it gives to view, hear, read: “artworks ... achieve a critical point ... where they must be ‘thought,’ not in external reflection but on their own terms; the intellectual mediation belongs to their own sensual arrangement and determines their perception” (90). Art demands thought as much as it offers (dis)pleasure;

it is diagrammatic and ‘works itself out’ through its other, to what offers it to thought as resistance.⁶⁵ Thought takes its time: spirit, as what makes the work transcend its thingliness, is an immanent process (91), malleable, historical.

As Adorno sees it, ‘spirit’ has been distorted through its philosophical appropriation, through which it is forced to circulate within discursive architectonics, divorced from its perceptual ‘setting.’ “The aesthetic concept of spirit has been severely compromised not only by idealism but also by writings dating from the nascence of radical modernism, among them those of Kandinsky” (87). Kandinsky, in his rebellion against what he perceived to be the one-sided hyper-sensuality of surrealism, “abstractly isolated the contrary of this principle and reified it,” whereas spirit - owing to its “immanent mediation” through the artwork - does not “constitute a level above or below appearance” (ibid.). To do so amounts to spirit’s “reification. The locus of spirit is the configuration of what appears” (ibid.).

The reification of spirit is its de-historicization. The rhetoric of purity of avant-garde abstraction makes art ‘appear’ as somehow ‘above’ its materiality, and necessarily misreads its own praxis as the inferior, sensible aspect of the Platonic *eidos*. As Mark Cheetham observes, the ideology of purity “depends on a transcendental absolute that denies art’s materiality” (Cheetham 1991, 119). Furthermore, in its insistence on absolute and historical invariance, this strategy of essentialism bespeaks a proto-fascist “restorative nostalgia” (Boym 2002), which Cheetham, commenting on the writings of Mondriaan and Kandinsky, characterizes as a “metaphysical nostalgia,” evincing the desire “to return to the supposed safety of timeless origins” and “and absolute that is by definition original and unassailable” (1991, 111).

Since Torres-García’s writing testifies to a comparable desire to return to a primordial purity, his aesthetic theory is really an anti-aesthetic doctrine. Constructive universalism does not allow the artwork to appear in its indeterminacy *qua* appearance, but instead only allows it to be read as already conceptualized under the auspices of his

⁶⁵ I will address the diagrammatology of aesthesis in Chapter 7, where I discuss the heuristic relation between word and image in the neo-baroque aesthetic of antropofagia.

neo-classical, symbolic framework. The work of art is already ‘spoken for’ in advance. Upon his return to Montevideo, the rhetoric of purity will rear its ugly colonial head, and will force Torres-García to abandon it (but not without some bitterness).⁶⁶

Vitalism, Decadence and Purity in Constructive Universalism: A Detour

Torres-García’s artistic doctrine equates the return to a primordial abstract unity with a salvaging of society’s vital forces. Indeed, in addition to its ideology of purity, constructive universalism bespeaks a vitalistic ontology that sees its task as the restitution of an organic social totality. It is to this philosophy of history in Torres-García’s theory that I now briefly turn. However, as an in-depth study of the possible sources in Torres-García’s aesthetic theory for his strand of vitalism, as well as his conception of decadence as he equates it with figuration, is yet to be undertaken, this section must be read as but a prolegomenon for a recalibration of the image of modernity and the avant-garde. The full historical implications are beyond the scope of this inquiry and I will limit myself to providing some tentative lines for future inquiry.

Generally speaking, Torres-García shares the cultural diagnosis and biological metaphoric economy of Friedrich Nietzsche, who maintained that the modern era was essentially decadent, a period marked by an inescapable weakening of life-forces, exacerbated by societal structures and institutions intent on the repression of the health-generating, affirmative will to power and its exuberant expenditure of psychic energies.⁶⁷ In addition, constructive universalism subscribed to Oswald Spengler’s organicist conception of world history and his analysis - inspired by Nietzsche - in *The Decline of the West* (1918-1922) that European civilization had entered a stage of irreversible

⁶⁶ For Torres-García’s progressive disenchantment and loosening of his programmatic claims, which he ascribes to the ‘backwardness’ of an ungrateful ‘home’ so ill-prepared to receive his glad tidings, see chapter 3.

⁶⁷ I cannot do justice to the intricate development of Nietzsche’s thought on decadence and vitalism or his bio-social poetics of history. For detailed discussions of Nietzsche’s thought in this regard, see Schotten 2009, 41-66; Benson 2008, 55-78. For an overview of ‘cult of decadence’ in European modernism, see Kline and Schor 2002.

decline and that the future of humanity was now to be found in the New World.⁶⁸ Torres-García saw figuration as indexical of cultural decline, and his metaphysical system was proposed in order to combat “decadent realism and restore the lost abstract order” (Ramírez 2009, 46). His research and experimentation in abstraction is thus driven by an ontological urgency to ‘cure’ an ailing civilization of its materialist obsession and force a new understanding of being through the recovery of the purity of abstraction. Constructive universalism desires nothing less than a historical break through the reclamation of primitive, vital forces, which would bring about a resumption of history prior to the decadence colonialism brought with it. As Torres-García writes in “Decadence and Primitivism” ([1928] 2009):

If we want to bring an end to all decadent art and, following a tendency that more or less all artists are capable of, by which I mean an irresistible tendency toward all that is primitive ... we may become the primitives of another era of art. Because I do not think that art must remain in a period of decadence forever, and inevitable, sooner or later, a new period must begin (2009, 177).⁶⁹

The primordality of abstraction echoes Wilhelm Worringer’s thesis in *Abstraction and Empathy* that geometric art was the earliest form of human artistic expressivity. In this work, Worringer takes up Aloïs Riegl’s notion of *Kunstwollen* - the urge to art as “will to form” (Worringer 1997, 9) but mutes the strictness of the latter’s positivist teleology. Instead, Worringer proposes a cyclical model in which the primitive “urge to abstraction” (Worringer 1997, 19) has made its return, signalling the recurrence of a similar pathology. For “savage peoples,” abstraction was expressive of an “immense spiritual dread of space” (15), which primitive man sought to overcome by imposing geometrical order over “the unending flux of being” (17) and to quiet the fear of chaotic external space. However, as humanity slowly uncovers its rational powers (and with it the power of domination over that external space), this urge to abstraction makes way for “the urge to empathy,” which is “a happy pantheistic relationship between man and the phenomena of the outside world” (15). However, since “man is now just as lost and helpless vis-à-vis

⁶⁸ For a full exposition of Spengler’s ideas, see Farrenkopf 2001. For more details on Spengler’s influence on Latin American thought, see Unruh 1994, 127.

⁶⁹ Joaquín Torres-García, “Excerpts from ‘Decadence and Primitivism,’” in Ramírez 2009, 177-78.

the world picture as primitive man” (18), abstraction has returned in response to modern alienation. For Torres-García, this process of degradation was already underway with the Renaissance, “as art started to depend on individualistic and racial feeling,” giving “free reign to those sentiments peculiar to individuals or races, which resulted in naturalism” (Torres-García in Ramírez 1992, 165). The universal, ‘ecumenical’ dimension of art was lost through the excess of particularity and sensuality of which mimetic figuration was the apogee.⁷⁰

Through his rhetoric of purity, Torres-García inverts the valances and frames figuration not as a happy pantheistic confidence in the power of reason in the face of the world of appearances. Instead, he views figuration as symptomatic of over-civilization and hyper-sensuality. Furthermore, geometry is not the expression of spatial anxiety, but instead testifies to the vital impulse itself:

For Torres-García, the self-referential plastic structure was more than a reflection of the work’s internal order: it was also an evident manifestation of its ‘vital’ impulse. Thus, the structures of these works were ‘alive’; their life emanating from the unity and coherence of their internal elements as well as their relationship to a more encompassing totality (Ramírez 2009, 46).⁷¹

Decadence can only be overcome by a return to the origin of art, i.e., by the rescue of the purity of the geometric, which he found increasingly instantiated in pre-Columbian art. In addition to revealing a proximity to Van Doesburg’s thought, Torres-García’s ‘geometric vitalism’ is an echo of cubist theorization and its appropriation of Henri Bergson’s philosophy, as in Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Les peintures cubistes: meditations esthétiques* (1913) and *Du cubisme* (1912), written by the two Salon Cubists Albert Gleizes and Jean

⁷⁰ Incidentally, Torres-García might also be following Worringer in his depreciation of the baroque as a “‘derivative style’ of increasing degeneration” (Salgado 1999, 322).

⁷¹ Torres-García shares Kandinsky’s, Mondriaan’s, and van Doesburg’s deeply spiritual conception of abstraction, as well as its utopian potential. Mondriaan, for example, writes that “pure plastic vision must construct a new society, just as it has constructed a new plastic art” (qtd. in Cheetham 1991, 119). Whereas Mondriaan turns to “static perfection” in his search for the “essential through art” (bespeaking the influence of Theosophy in the theorization of his work), what Van Doesburg “finds is a principle of perpetual vitalism” made possible through his reading of Hegel – for whom the dialectic is movement – thereby envisioning a “‘perpetual transformation’ of plastic forms” (ibid., 109). Constructive universalism seems to have adopted Van Doesburg’s equation of geometric principles with vitalism, although he reproached Torres-García for the inclusion of figurative elements in the picture plane, thus going against an all-too dogmatic ‘rhetoric of purity’ (cf. Kattouw 1991).

Metzinger.⁷² Bergson's anti-materialist and idealist philosophy "provided a body of ideas, evident in much contemporary Cubist criticism, consistent with concerns about 'inner essences,' metaphysical alternatives to positivism, and poetic evocations of reality" (Frascina in Harrison, Frascina and Perry 1993, 140). In this reading, Cubism gives shape to the inner consciousness of perception, to a reality made up of "memories, experiences of the past," "a simultaneous flow of past and present" in which "time is essentially intuitive 'experience,' flow or what Bergson calls 'duration'" (ibid., 138). On this reading, Cubism presents the artist's consciousness of the outside world in its perceptual flux and poetic interrelation with the *durée* of memory. Apollinaire saw cubism as engaging with the 'inner life' and the psychology of time, and painting as a means to "encompass past, present and future in a single glance. The canvas must exhibit that essential unity which alone induces ecstasy" (Apollinaire 2004, 8).

Rather than frame geometry in terms of rational instrumentalization, which Torres-García associated with monocular perspective (and the evolution towards naturalism), the Uruguayan painter sees geometry as the *élan vital* at work, as giving form to an original impetus that interpenetrates all differentiated forms of life (cf. Bergson 2001, 2).⁷³ Constructive universalism thus reads originary vitalism in terms of an expressive, life-enhancing, anti-decadent, pre-figurative geometric abstraction. This, articulated through the rhetoric of purity, is projected onto an image of an eidetic realm of innate forms, which was best approximated by the artistic praxis of 'primitive peoples,' i.e., the Andean tectonic paradigm.

⁷² For an exhaustive analysis of the relation between cubism and Bergsonian philosophy, see Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁷³ As Pearson and Mullarkey point out in their introduction to the selection of key works by Bergson, *élan vital* was "poorly understood" (2001, 2) at the time of its formulation, but it is the popularization of the term – and Bergsonian philosophy in general – that made its way into cubist theory. Or rather, it is cubist critical discourse that created a specific Bergson, in a sense 'constructing' a cubist Bergson (cf. Antliff 1993). Since the influence of Bergsonian vitalism was so pervasive in the French intellectual climate of the early decades of the twentieth century, there were multiple Bergsons. For a philosophical re-reading of Bergson's concepts, see Pearson and Mullarkey in Bergson 2001, 1- 48. For its cubist appropriation, see Antliff 1993.

However, as Torres-García does make an exception for a certain degree of figuration through *grafismo*, his discourse, which equates the rhetoric of purity with the ontology of a primordial expressivity, will always be at odds with his visual works. Driven by the ideology of purity, constructive universalism will take great pains in repressing *grafismo*'s figurative aspect and make the pictograms visible as abstract and universal as possible. However, as will become evident in my reading in terms of graphism and hypericonicity, *grafismo*'s symbols always pose the specter of mimesis and narrativity and lay bare a materiality the rhetoric of purity and ethnographic abstraction cannot come to terms with.⁷⁴ Decadence is at the heart of constructive universalism.

In sum, constructive universalism counters the image of the avant-garde as rupture with one that radicalizes continuity by inserting itself in a cyclical conception of history. Abstraction is not innovation, but the restitution of a communal ethos. Avant-garde is a matter of preservation – it becomes a type of conservatism. However, this idea of return is not the restitution of Edenic fullness. Against the premises of the rhetoric of purity, a return does not simply link up to what pre-existed: it brings the origin into being, it constructs the *arkhé*, and is thus a material act of production – through images and texts – of a new tradition: the tectonic paradigm.

Torres-García's Theoretical Stance: The Construction of Arkhétectonics

What is at stake now is to 'think' constructive universalism aesthetically. What I will do in the remainder of this chapter (as well as the chapters that follow), is to deconstruct,

⁷⁴ Incidentally, Cheetham's account of the rhetoric of purity of abstraction provides no counter-reading through a consideration of what the images have to 'say,' that is, through their resistance to this rhetoric by their aesthetic truth, their material force. The final chapter of *The Rhetoric of Purity*, "Klee and the Interrogation of Purity" (Cheetham 1991, 139-151), does not tend to the visual praxis but again takes Paul Klee's discourse as a possible deconstruction of the claims of purity of doctrinal abstraction. Cheetham leaves the impression that he actually 'sees' the rhetoric of purity illustrated in the images of abstract art, which becomes apparent in his discussion of Mondriaan's *Composition in Black and Grey (Lozenge with Grey Lines)* (ibid., 60-62). Cheetham "looks closely at the individual 'forms' that many of the intersections of these heavier lines delineate" in Mondriaan's *Composition*, only to "see the Neoplatonic equivalent of the stars' unequal emanations of light" (60; my emphasis). The ambiguity of 'seeing' – as both perceptual and cognitive/ideational – makes the rhetoric of purity appear as the only legitimate way to discursivize abstraction, no matter how wrongheaded it may have been. In other words, Cheetham allows no counter-rhetoric that departs from an engagement from the images that would let the Adornian 'spirit' of the work into the frame.

step by step, the claims of constructive universalism's theory by reading them against the 'evidence' provided by the artwork. Ultimately, it is to recognize that constructive universalism is the *material* co-production of preconquest culture manufactured in sync with its own artistic experimentation: it is the construction of the Amerindian model, of which both constructive universalist works as well as pre-Columbian works are not the illustrations, but their thinking through (Figure 1.7).

Torres-García's theory erects a conceptual edifice through which not only his own experiments, but also the artefacts he chooses as his ancestor become visible in a determinate way. In fact, Torres-García interpreted his own artworks precisely in terms of their subsumability to the paradigm he had created, exhorting that "constructive art can and must be incorporated into the great Inca culture of South America, and especially into the primitive, the pre-Inca" (qtd. in Paternosto 1996, 217). Indeed, the co-creation of the modern in the archaic and the legibility of the archaic through the avant-garde constituted a model and lighting example to which subsequent generations of Latin American artists would return to legitimate their own praxis. Indeed, "Torres-García's art and writings . . . turned into a new paradigm for a visual system of codes that differentiates South American art from mainstream forms of Modernism and Post-Modernism" (Ramírez 1992, 253).



Figure 1.7 Torres-García, *Coloured Structure*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 61 x 50 cm. Cecilia Torres collection, New York. [Rowell, 63 (see Figure 1.2)].

At the time of its insertion into the cultural context of the South America of the thirties, the paradigm of constructive universalism was formulated as a counter-paradigm to naturalist figuration, exemplified in the muralist movement. From Torres-García's vantage point, muralism was symptomatic of the decadence of an imported style illegitimately mixing in indigenous elements. He deemed this operation a bastardization, pastiche, plagiarism. In a text of 1942, "The New Art of America," Torres-García warns against superficial appropriation, that is to say, a thematic or merely 'decorative,' aesthetic, non-conceptual (non-metaphysical) appropriation of the Indo-American.⁷⁵ He warns against the extreme danger of

falling into the archaeological, making South American pastiches. That is what everyone who has tried to make an indigenous art has fallen into: Chileans, Mexicans, Peruvians, etc., not

⁷⁵ Joaquín Torres-García, "The New Art of America," in Ramírez, ed., 1992, 75-80.

excluding figures like Diego Rivera: and if not that, into another stumbling block just as dangerous: the folkloric. We can come even closer to our tradition through figuration; but that is just what we should avoid because above all that will bring us nearer to plagiarism or imitation of that art and its particular stylization. Let us be content with a mere geometric style, which is what links us to that remote art (Torres-García 1992, 79).

Against pastiche, Torres-García proposes an appropriation of the ‘spirit’ of Indo-American art in terms of the revival of geometric thought. As read through the avant-garde paradigm of geometric abstraction, pre-Columbian art becomes newly legible as a counter-force lying dormant all along: now is the time for it to regain its vitality and to reconstitute abstraction as new origin, as new point of departure for an ‘autochthonous’ Latin American visual art. This, then, is the beginning – or rather the restitution – of American history, the resumption of a continuum interrupted by colonialism.

Constructive universalism is framed as an avatar of decolonization:

At a certain moment, [our culture’s] normal evolution was interrupted by the invaders. Which is to say, that it was buried for almost four centuries. I believe that if the autochthonous culture is to continue, it has to be taken up where it was left off, ignoring a false culture that was formed later: false in the sense that it could never be more than a transplant. And that hybrid thing (for it has mixed and become deformed) is what we call our culture, that bastard culture that has taken shape on our continent. That exaltation of the invader and its grotesque manifestation should cease. Because the Indian was a geometer (Torres-García 1992, 80).

Constructive universalism’s project of decolonization, informed by the utopia of the restitution of non-instrumental, ‘accented’ geometry, is framed as a project of *de-figuration*. Hence, the precise delineation of abstraction from figuration becomes one of the most intense concerns informing the theoretical labour undertaken by constructive universalist discourse. In order to effect this separation, Torres-García mobilizes the fundamental distinction between ‘to order (put in order)’ and ‘to create an order,’ in which “the difference between the two terms concerns the oppositions between an order at the service of representation (Torres uses the landscape as an example) and an order not subject to representation” (Fló 1992, 28). Constructive universalism dedicates itself to the creation of an order in which figurative elements are permitted as long as they submit to the overall structural, plastic organization of the visual plane. This compliance with the integrity of the overall composition is read in terms of authenticity, of a true ‘supra-

aesthetic' appropriation of the pre-Columbian rather than a merely 'aesthetic' plagiarizing through the adoption of sensory, pictorial motifs. "The most recent work, as long as its representation is geometric and schematic, observing rhythm, order, and measure, can – because of that representation and because we are native to these lands – be as genuine as any Inca or Aztec work" (Torres-García 1992, 79). The clearest case of illegitimate figuration is perspective, which uses geometry as a mere means 'at the service of representation,' of making the phenomenal, the particular, present again through a 'descriptive,' 'anecdotal,' minimal narrative 'cut-out' from the sensory world of perception (cf. Fló 1992). The exclusion of the third dimension is the one area where Torres-García will never compromise, as if its negation were a synecdoche for the coherence of the 'pre-Columbian' in general. Art is relocated on a logical – cosmic, discursive, ontological, supra-aesthetic – field rather than a sensory field, turning particular visual works into propositions within a larger syllogism. The artefacts of constructive universalism, as well as Indo-American ruins, are set within this regime of legibility, this grand induction of primordial 'Abstract Man.'

The distinction between 'creating an order' and 'putting in order' has repercussions for the regime of legibility. Torres-García coordinates the desired reception of his work with an intelligibility that reads his work as the instantiation of the 'creation' of an order. This is a tectonic order, or, to be more precise, it is an *arkhé-tectonic*: the visibility Torres-García desires is one in which the ideal viewer is an inhabitant of the new ritual community in which the utopia of a reintegration of life into art – the driving utopia of the historical avant-garde as Peter Bürger sees it⁷⁶ – has been realized. The regime of legibility that constructive universalism puts in motion is one in which the past has already flowed into a future, making the present a timeless now. The work of art is envisioned as speaking to a future generation for whom the nostalgic dream of cosmic art has come true, thus evincing the realignment of modern thought with an atavistic Indo-American metaphysics. The anxiety is thus not with figuration *per se*, but with over-figuration, that is to say, a figuration unmoored by the ontotheological concept of primordial, telluric 'Abstract Man.' However, it is here that a fundamental ambiguity

⁷⁶ Cf. *supra*.

becomes apparent: rather than a pure end in itself, geometry within constructive universalism must also put itself in the service of a paradigm. That is to say, the exclusion of the third dimension, formulated against decadent naturalism and its elevation of the perspectival grid, is the reappropriation – the reawakening, the excavation – of the Andean textile grid, “buried for almost four centuries,” of which constructive universalism’s geometric design would be the expression.

Rather than inscribe his work within the standard teleology of Western art history of his time, in which the avant-garde is read as the logical progression from the figurative to art’s becoming self-conscious of its immanent, medium-specific laws, which are then reread in terms of abstraction, Torres-García makes it visible through a counter-tradition he endows with paradigmatic force: “When [Torres-García] discovers the geometric (*tectonic*) character of Andean art he inscribes it into the universal tradition and at the same time tries to make his own ‘Constructive Art’ belong to the Andean tradition” (Paternosto 1996, 217). The true primitive neoclassicism of Torres-García’s Indo-American Renaissance is formulated against the Mediterranean Renaissance, and the ascendance of the paradigm of geometry subdued by the demands of verisimilitude through monocular, linear perspective. The restitution of the pre-Columbian textile grid is framed as the authentic Andean counter-paradigm to the artistic paradigm of the ‘invader.’ César Paternosto reads the main achievement of constructive universalism, and Torres-García’s historic contribution, as the excavation of the model of Andean, pre-contact tectonic abstraction, whose constitutive role Paternosto deems equivalent to that of the West’s perspectival system:

Weaving became the most developed art form, and its planar, sub-angular imagery influenced virtually all Andean iconography expressed in other media, such as ceramics, painting or sculpture. The coordinates of the textile grid – warp and weft – played a function similar to the coordinates of the Renaissance perspective system in the West (Paternosto 2001, 56).

Moreover, “it was weaving – the manipulation of thread – that became the structural matrix not only for the geometric designs but also for the predominant orthogonal iconography of Andean arts” (Paternosto 1996, 12). Even more significant is that a genuine expression of the culture of the South via the reviving of the tectonic grid

provokes the primordial meaning – the authentic essence – of art itself. Paternosto gives etymology the force of argument, and suggests that the Andean paradigm is closer to the truth of the meaning of art than its Western derivation, which has strayed so far from its (etymological) roots:

The Indo-European root *teks*, in suffix form *teks-na*, means craft (weaving or fabricating), from which the Greek term *tekhné* derives (art, craft, skill). Guided by this etymological meaning, we return to the primal concept of art: not only is the original interdependence between art and the primordial human impulse to construct or weave illuminated, but we also find that every work of art can be thought of as a *construction* (ibid., 211; emphasis in original).

The rhetorical ploy of etymology lays bare a fundamental confusion, upsetting the supposed purity of the non-Western paradigm, showing how intricately ‘interwoven’ the ‘pre-Columbian’ is with the ‘post-Columbian.’ This tracing of an *arkhé-tectonic* is artifice and gives *mestizaje* the last word: only the South can return the “primordial concept of art” to the West. From both Torres-García’s as well as Paternosto’s reimagining of constructive universalism, it is the Andean paradigm that opens up the clearing, the lighting that the Greeks closed off as soon as they glimpsed it: through some strange affinity the Greek and the Inca are intimately related ‘in spirit.’ In fact, it is the Inca who are read as if they were Greek; perhaps they are even more so given that they were more faithful to the spirit of archaic Greek geometric art. In this narrative, the primordial essence of art was deemed lost through decades of decadence and imitative fervour, as crystallized in the notion of *representatio*.⁷⁷ Is this account not a pastiche of Heidegger, where Heraclitus now speaks Quecha, or, more poignantly, where the Inca high priest is forced to write in archaic Greek?

The *arkhé-tectonic* is bound up with the idea of restitution, with Torres-García’s ambition “to restore art in its archaic condition in Uruguay and in all Latin America” (Fló 1992, 31) that motivated – or retrospectively justified – the artist’s return to his native country. As mentioned above, this restitution is artificial in that it amounts to the nostalgia for a *constructed* – through warp and weft, as well as foreshortening and vanishing points – prehistory. Torres-García formulates the task at hand: “We could

⁷⁷ I provide a short elucidation of Heidegger’s critique of representational thought in Section 1.2.

describe our history in one word: decadence. And decadence is the end. That is why we have to return to the beginning” (1992, 73).⁷⁸ In the end, Torres-García will see that the end is not so different from the beginning. His return to the plane of “geometric thought” (1992, 74) did not take into account the resistance of actuality. The sensory field of his visual works’ heterogeneous space-time challenges the melancholy disavowal of this “bastard culture” he was born into (and died into, right back at the beginning), with its pastiches, its plagiarists, its provincial backwardness, its mediocrity, its maddening superficiality. As *ars retorica*, the discourse of ‘purity’ is an art form in itself thematizing something different than the images. It is a means of avoiding the baroque superposition of his painterly oeuvre.⁷⁹

In anticipation of the discussion of Torres-García’s *graphismo* – his system of pictographic symbols, which, as I will elucidate, undergoes disruption through the irreducibility of the visual – and his theory of the sign, one could propose the hypothesis, which I will substantiate further on in this chapter, that it is precisely the overinvestment in trying to uphold the abstract and the figurative as the terms for a sought-after synthesis that destines this very synthesis to collapse. The paradox resides in the fact that Torres-García desires the reconciliation between figuration and abstraction while simultaneously insisting on their essential antinomy, as the interaction between both terms serves as the animating principle of constructive universalism’s architectonic. This is borne out in Torres-García’s incessant revisions of the status of figuration and the often-contradictory statements in which he tries to distinguish illegitimate from legitimate figuration. That it is a matter of overinvestment is clear: Torres-García frames the opposition abstract-figurative as necessarily linked to an absolute incongruity between the pre-colonial – interpreted as anti-colonial, as de-colonial – and the colonial. Each new text attempts to state, once and for all, the clear and distinct boundaries between both terms, only to be revised in a subsequent one, as if the future of a whole continent depended on the wresting of the abstract from the figurative. Yet, what Torres-García’s discourse is at

⁷⁸ Joaquín Torres-García, “Excerpts from *Metaphysics of Indo-American Prehistory*,” in Ramírez, ed., 1992, 70-74.

⁷⁹ For a case study of the tactic of superimposition, see Chapter 3, section 3.2 in particular, in which the *Inverted Map* becomes visible as an overlay of post-Columbian *mestizaje*.

pains to clarify, his works of art seem intent on obscuring at every point.⁸⁰ It is the realization on Torres-García's part that the visual – his own works in particular, but also the Mesoamerican and Andean works he elevates to the status of model – refuses to act as the illustration of a theory. It is this non-conformity – or rather, *indifference* with respect to conceptual differentiation – of the visual regarding its verbal transcription Torres-García's theory registers, a theory where movement, oscillation is dramatized through its logical inconstancy, in which the under-determination of the sensory encounter with the art work is countered through an overdetermination in words.

One of the spaces where this oscillation occurs is *grafismo*, whose claims to and simultaneous self-undermining of the systematic/architectonic will be the subject of the following chapter. However, what I mean with 'oscillation' may become clearer when considering two conflicting interpretations of Torres-García's *grafismo*, one in the mode of abstraction (*grafismo* as keeping 'nature' at bay), the other in the mode of figuration (*grafismo* as inviting 'nature' back into the abstract composition). The interpretive conflict concerning the meaning of the visual symbols does in fact not register a contradiction for which a 'solution' was then found by Torres-García by the adoption of schematic figures as a way of overcoming his own 'problematic,' which then magically vanished in his paintings once he had formulated his theory. *Grafismo* is the point, the constant, in a field of infinite variables clustering around the concepts 'abstraction' and 'figuration.' *Grafismo* marks the moments of oscillation – congealed in the 'minutes' of Torres-García's ever mobile field of enunciation, his ever-expanding corpus of art philosophical texts – between the two terms, abstraction and figuration. There is no 'correct' reading of *grafismo*; its principle is motion itself.

⁸⁰ Foucault's observation in *The Order of Things* regarding Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* that "it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say" (Foucault 1970, 10) can help to elucidate the aporetic logic of Torres-García's incessant recalibration of his writing as it attempts to clarify the recalcitrant visibility of his art. Constructive universalism exhibits a 'vanity' in that, through its 'rhetoric of purity,' it is unable to approach the work of art in its aesthetic fullness. The indeterminacy of the artwork's "appearing" (Adorno 1997), which demands determination by thought so as to make its 'spirit' come forth is what the logical field of constructive universalism is structurally blind to. In this sense, its concepts are empty, lacking a sensory negotiation with discursive mediation. Torres-García is unable to 'see' aesthetically, as all his energy is directed towards an absolute legibility devoid of the interference of an 'inconvenient' visibility, consistently detracting from the purity of the *eidōs*. For an elucidation of Foucault's dictum in relation to antropofagia, see Chapter 7 (Section 7.1).

Juan Fló and César Paternosto formulate two ‘moments’ in the discourse of constructive universalism as it pertains to its theory of *grafismo*. This is a theory that, marked by an incessant wavering, has an effect on the images it speaks of and that makes them opaque; it restores their visual indeterminacy through conceptual overcoding, through the work of contradiction. Let us begin with Fló’s cosmic, abstract-indexical reading:

The schematic signs are no more than an abstract conceptual illusion – described – inaccurately in *Historia de mi vida* [Story of My Life] as a form of relation to reality. Other texts confirm, however, what an analysis of his paintings clearly demonstrates: they are signs that indicate an intentional link with the cosmos unrelated to the actual vision of nature or to the languages that attempt to transcribe it (Fló 1992, 32).

Paternosto offers the ‘incorrect,’ contrary reading of the same visual elements, framing them as indices of the particularity of the phenomenal world, which would constitute the formal ‘solution’ to Torres-García’s struggle with abstraction and figuration.

The schematic images of objects enclosed within the compartments created by the linear scaffolding of verticals and horizontals solved, at first, the problem of the reference to the real world (Paternosto 2001, 78).

As discursive formation, *grafismo* evinces unease with visual resemblance, with figuration, with the pictorial as such. It shows how resemblance institutes an anxiety (Fló), or a ‘solution’ (Paternosto); in both cases, it becomes something thought has to contend with.

What these two perspectives on the same ‘problem’ show is how the visibility of the problem is a construction of regimes of legibility, of certain comportments invested in specific positions formulated by Torres-García. Fló sides with the “other texts” Torres-García has written – as well as invoking the “paintings themselves,” as if the visual, the aesthetic were concerned with problems of logic, of settling binaries – to deny the relationality of *grafismo* to visible reality. Paternosto on the other hand invokes the ‘inaccuracy’ of *Historia de mi vida* to legitimate and add rhetorical force to the contrary regime of legibility.

Both statements constitute manoeuvres of discourse determined to give a clear place of legibility to *grafismo*. However, the iconic remainder always slips away from under conceptual grasp. The continuous movement in Torres-García's texts – and the readings trying to come to terms with his work and completely missing it in the process since they never go further than the logical field established by the words of the painter – is testimony to the instability of *grafismo* and constructive universalism as the name for a praxis of painting: the sensory field always returns. An analysis of his works will always have to contend with the ambiguity of the schematic signs, hovering as they do between a 'language' that 'merely points' to the ritual in some abstract, 'non-anecdotal' way and their iconicity, the modicum of resemblance and particularity that disrupts their clean decoding as 'mere pointing.' The oscillation between the painting as index of the metaphysical and as index of the physical world is discourse's transcription of the discomfort attendant on allowing the work of art to be felt in all its opacity.

This has wider implications for the art works of constructive universalism as a whole: there is no 'correct,' fully adequate reading of constructive universalist art since the contradictions in its writings – its logical field that is – are adaptations to the work of aesthesis. What the heaping of contradictory layers of theory registers is the loosening of all determinate conceptual configurations when confronted with the work of aesthesis undertaken by the image, as well as the moments of aesthetics that Torres-García's text has transferred and recuperated for itself in reply to the resistance of the image to the word, thus creating a loop-effect. The art works question the momentary pronouncements of the discourse they engender by insisting on an aesthetic indeterminacy, an indeterminacy that is worked through via discursive overdetermination. They make the permanent instability between 'abstraction' and 'figuration' visible as moments in a reversible continuum; this is an instability to the point of reversibility in which the term 'abstraction' suddenly becomes close to an earlier formulation of 'figuration,' and where 'figuration' in its turn suddenly comes to resemble the logic of 'abstraction.' A space of tension and movement between antinomies is thus created to the point of fundamental indiscernibility, of essential *mestizaje*: it is impossible to decide whether Torres-García's art is abstract or figurative; it is both. Nevertheless, perhaps such a decision does not matter in the least since the work of art does not concern itself with such names. The fact

that there is so much debate as to the correct subsumption of the oeuvre – even through such a ‘generous solution’ as *mestizaje* – registers the image’s indifference in the face of conceptual demands. This is precisely what is staged in Fló’s and Paternosto’s opposite readings, which perhaps ultimately try to express the same thing: the ineffability of the image.

As if in reply to the indeterminacy of the aesthesis of the work of art, the sheer mass of writing, with its convoluted routes of clarifications, retractions and reaffirmations – what I have called ‘discursive overdetermination’ – tries to do justice to the instability of the meaning of the image. In so doing however, the textual routes also point to the fundamental interrelation of pre- and post-Columbian – the interlacement is the work’s side-effect. The corpus of Torres-García’s discourse, taken as a whole, is a compendium of contradictions attesting to the relentless indifference of art in face of regimes of legibility/visibility. In this particular case it reveals the fundamental relativity and instability of the conceptual pair figurative-abstract, an insight with devastating effects on Torres-García attempts to maintain the integrity of his utopian image of constructive universalism as redemption from (over-)figuration. Since figuration is a matter of relation, so is coloniality: in the final analysis, the pre-Columbian and post-Columbian are indissociable, always mutually complicit. After his long trajectory back to the origin, after recognizing that constructive universalism did not really take root during his lifetime, Torres-García admitted that he had been European, and even a figurative-realist painter, all along, just when he thought to be reviving the spirit of abstraction through the tectonic, woven grid (cf. Buzio de Torres 1992, 22).

The instability between abstract/figurative is already encoded in the tenuous distinction between ‘to order (put in order)’ and ‘to create an order.’ What is the ultimate criterion that would allow us to distinguish – through visual perception alone, by merely looking at something (provided there were such a thing as *merely* looking, uninformed by conceptuality or a world horizon) – *creating* from *ordering*? Through this imprecision, figurative elements become ambiguous, and are always open to further inspection. In fact, figures can now appear out of the blue, shaped as they are by this hermeneutics of suspicion. Since their incorporation is subject to restrictions, figurative elements – or

even the mere semblance of figuration – charge the canvas with a certain anxiety attendant on the idea of a threshold between the legitimate and illegitimate. Constructive universalist art philosophy invariably evinces the somewhat paranoid suspicion that a work might have *too much* of the figurative, making it tip over into decadence, into the colonial.⁸¹ The figurative seems to hold the power to jump out of the frame, escaping the confines of the grid.

The task constructive universalism formulates for itself in its theories is to achieve a moment of equilibrium between the abstract and the figurative. That is to say, what is at stake is the correct subsumption, the right amount of ‘quieting’ of the ‘literary,’ the ‘anecdotal,’ or the ‘particular’ so as to make the architectonics of the plastic configuration speak more clearly to the mind’s eye of universality – and not to the gluttonous sensory eye mired in particularity. A certain aniconic ascesis must exude from the painting. However, it is precisely this tempering of likeness (*eikon*), of putting the figurative parts in the service of the self-organizing whole with its demand of ‘supra-aesthetic’ compliance to the idea (the *eidos*, archetype of ‘Abstract man’), which must fail. All Torres-García ever wanted was a sober, iconoclastic metaphysics, but all he gets is layers of paint on a support, as if the work itself demands to be reckoned with as the moment where the abstract and the figurative are fundamentally intertwined, caught up in an unstable back-and-forth. It is also the moment in which coloniality reveals itself as the indistinguishability between the ‘pre-’ and ‘post-Columbian.’ The canvas then becomes the space where cause and effect become interchangeable: the aesthetic is the moment-space where the conceptual has no definite hold. What came first, the colonial or the pre-colonial, the figurative or the abstract? Must one not locate the true ‘origin’ of the pre-

⁸¹ In none of his text is Torres-García clear on the limit between figuration and abstraction. This can be read as evidence for the internal contradiction between the rhetoric of purity and the inclusion of pictorial symbols, in that the latter carry with them a historical charge that does not fit well with the ideology of a pure beginning. If, on the other hand, we can take the critical literature as an indication on the zone of legitimacy constructive universalism set out as far as figuration is concerned, then Carl Jung’s theory of archetypal representations seems the furthest an ‘authentic’ constructive universalist work finds permissible. Considered as ‘Jungian pictograms,’ Torres-García’s grafismos would be pictograms purified of local pictorial-figurative conventions in that they are supposedly innate and universally shared. This anthropological universalism would make *grafismo* compatible with the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis, and this is precisely what Mário H. Gradowczyk (2007) presupposes when claiming that Jungian theory is best ‘suited’ for an analysis of *grafismo*. For a discussion of *grafismo* and a critique of Gradowczyk’s approach, see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.

colonial in the colonial itself, as the effect of inscriptions into regimes of legibility/visibility? “I almost believed in a miracle,” Torres-García (qtd. in Fló 1992, 36) observes after the AAC, the organization that would realize his dream of a South American art enlivened by the new – or rather, ancient – tectonic paradigm, dissolved in 1939. The miracle would not have been the universal adoption of constructive universalism as the autochthonous cultural paradigm of the South, but the extraction of the abstract from the ‘clutches’ of the figurative, the purity of the pre-Columbian from the impurity of the post-Columbian.

Both *Inverted Maps* invert the sun-filled ‘miracle’ of a simple, primordial origin into a mestizo dusk, into the din of pictorial-scriptural confusion, where resemblances and associations, together with the *manuscripted*, sensuous and tactile quality of the drawing as drawing (and not a prelude to conceptualization) upset the simple distinctions the logical field of the theory hopes for. The pictograms of the sun – Inti – the constellation of stars – their ‘minimalist’ shape resounding with that of the *omphalos*-cross pointing out Montevideo – and the moon-figure charge the map with a cosmological force. The pictorial symbols organize themselves into a reminder – or, perhaps, a *nostalgia*, a cryptic constellation of logograms bespeaking the pain of returning home, only to find ‘home,’ *criollo* Montevideo, wholly different from the fantasy that formed through a long absence. They give shape to a modern nostalgia for a projected, original astronomical sacrality that divined man’s place within the order of things, where things were not merely empty, measurable givens for instrumental reason to inspect and master, but self-determining ciphers within a mythical expanse of meaning – at least, this is one possible reading of the map: as image of melancholia. The contours of the South of the 1944 map (Figure 1.6), the shape the earth now assumes, is more schematic than that of the first map (Figure 1.3). The form of the South now oscillates between an abstract pictogram – as but one ideogram within the logogram comprised of sun, moon, cross, galleon, lines, words, fish and cross – and an objective-scientific idiom capitalizing on the effect of the real through the laws of geographic projection, and the cartographic literacy associated with it. The map, like the 1936 version, thus vacillates between the cosmological and the cartographical regimes of visibility and legibility: both are put in a relation of tension, forcing the eye to shift its own position with regard to

what and how it sees.⁸² The *Inverted Map* produces a never-ending double-take, refusing to give up its enigma, it never settles into a clear and distinct visual identity: the map is at odds with itself, running through circuits of irreconcilable regimes of visibility and legibility, orchestrating a complex *trompe l'oeil*, the place where the pre-Columbian bleeds into the Columbian, and vice-versa, in an 'impure' overlay.

In fact, the *Inverted Map*, through the uncertain status of its pictographs and its reluctance in providing a conceptual key enabling a clear allegorical decoding exploits the anarchic power of association and visual analogy. Indeed, where should one read the stable figure of 'Abstract Man' in these disorienting mappings? Coloniality,⁸³ which Torres-García essentialized (in his writing, it has to be stressed) in terms of an inauthentic *mestizaje* and hybridity – that is to say, a merely formal mixing without any metaphysical force behind it, denouncing it as 'mere' pastiche – and then aestheticized in terms of 'decadent' figuration, cannot but fail to return. Torres-García framed constructive universalism in terms of purification, as a means to wrest cultural independence from the colonizing North. He therefore sought to place constructive universalism within the continuum of Amerindian history, discursivizing it as a subordinate moment within an overall Indo-Amerindian tradition of abstraction, thus tearing it away from European paradigms of art historical discourse and ultimately dissociating it from the historical avant-garde. This relocation then becomes the avatar of purity and primordial authenticity, ensuring the integrity of constructive universalism as wholly Indo-American, that is to say, as authentically indigenous and not 'imported,' not *criollo*. In counterpoint, the map seems to call forth a new *mestizo* art in which primordial forms of geometric art are blended together with the figurative, the schematic, the Cartesian as well as Incan mythology, giving rise to 'Inca-Cartesian' cyphers of a new history already

⁸² See my discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between and intertwining of "assemblage haecceities" (cartography) and "interassemblage haecceities" (cosmology) earlier in this chapter.

⁸³ Coloniality, as opposed to the concept of the colonial, emphasizes the working through of the colonial. Coloniality stresses the fact that one is never truly 'done' with colonialism: its structures live on in the present (cf. Mignolo 2000). It equally broaches the fundamental indiscernibility – given the overdetermined routes of mediation which make the notion of 'roots' highly problematic – of the 'pre-Columbian' with respect to the 'post-Columbian.' This indiscernibility between 'pre-' and 'post-' will be explored in Chapter 3.

underway. The pre-Columbian coils into the classical European tradition, with the actuality of coloniality charging old European forms with new contours, thus deterritorializing their ‘provenance’ at the same time the Andean is syncopated with classical grid-rhythms.

Yet, both never ‘melt’ into a union – however ‘hybrid’ the image may present itself. The tension between both ‘axes’ remains palpable through a superimposition that refuses a harmonious reconciliation. Although the layers of the Andean and the Northern converge, there is no code, no legibility, which can provide a univocal, exhaustive account of the difference between the two regimes of the seeable at work. The map is layered, contradictory, heteronomous, and polysemous. It is the simulation of a modern map as much as it is a semblance of an ancient cosmology – the map contains alien cyphers not commensurable with clear and distinct ‘directions.’ It gives expression to the aura of lost rituality, approximating the 1613 “Cosmological Drawing” by Juan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti Yamqui Salcamaygua (see Chapter 3, section 3.2) by tracing out by hand a regime of visibility – i.e., that of a modern, mechanically reproducible Western cartography – with which it becomes fundamentally at odds. This singularity is brought home on a very basic level: the map remains inverted, irreversibly so. It will not rectify itself but holds on to the visual truth of its (cartographic) ‘mistake:’ contrariness *is* its truth, while the drawing by hand desists from any claims to pin-point accuracy – the map points the way to its self-parody. As such, the visual logic – or illogic if you will – of the map runs counter to the doctrine of constructive universalism, which, through its very insistence on universality, always frames the colonial period as an embarrassment, as in a way ‘too particular,’ – too sensory, too sensual. Whereas the map-image brings out the instability of visibilities, Torres-García’s discourse can only speak of coloniality – as the confrontation between and irreducibility of legibilities/visibilities – in terms of unwarranted mixture, of an actual *mestizaje* that corrupted the integrity of a supposed authentic, pre-existing abstract geometric spirit through a colonizing virus fostering grotesque combinations of the abstract and the illusionistic-naturalistic. What constructive universalism thus wants is an impossible *ideal mestizaje*, a non-colonial *mestizaje* as absolute *arkhé*, a *mestizaje* paradoxically unmixed from its very inception since it would only heed the tectonic matrix, pretending to have extricated itself from the

grid of projection. However, this desire for purity – as expressed by constructive universalism’s rhetoric of purity – is exactly what the *Inverted Map* contradicts.⁸⁴

Constructive universalism’s grounding presupposition is that the pure, the primordial and abstract can, in the final analysis, be clearly distinguished from imported, inauthentic, decadent ‘foreign’ models, that is to say, from figuration. In its formulation of its tenets however, constructive universalism inevitably runs against the self-imposed limits of its discourse. It is complicit in the construction of a theory that itself is painfully aware of replicating the abstract-figurative divide, and, as will become clear in the rest of this chapter, cannot but betray its own deepest-held beliefs. This is why Torres-García’s work never achieved a ‘solution.’⁸⁵

Although perhaps the animating principle of his writing, the struggle between abstraction and figuration is not framed in terms of a paranoid attachment to authenticity in his visual work, but instead through an oscillation - and ultimately an indiscernibility - between ‘first’ and ‘last,’ ‘abstract’ and ‘figurative,’ between ‘pure’ origin and ‘imported’ deviation. The impossibility of his theory, i.e., the performative contradiction of its grounding claim of being able to sharply distinguish the primordial from the derivative, is given shape in Torres-García’s painting through what I will call his ‘thickening’ of the grid. This thickening consists of applying traditionally mimetic, naturalistic techniques to geometric compositions, thus making the visual work itself already equivocate between origin and imitation.⁸⁶ Similarly, in the *Inverted Map*, the

⁸⁴ This is precisely the opposite stance of the *antropofagia* movement in Brazil of the 1920s, where the anarchic principle of mixture, heterogeneity and the absence of (doctrinal) purity – and the concomitant celebration of the colonial baroque – were hailed as authentically South American, and condensed in the figure of the European grotesque *par excellence*, viz. the cannibal. For a more detailed discussion, see Part 2, Chapters 5 and 6 in particular.

⁸⁵ Every work on Torres-García cites his period after 1930, with the ‘discovery’ of constructive universalism, as the period where he finally achieved the ‘solution’ between abstraction and figuration. Fló (1991) in particular holds fast to the ideology of reconciliation, although he signals the inconstancy and momentary nature of the solution.

⁸⁶ I am here following Juan Fló’s lead in “Torres-García in (and from) Montevideo,” (in Ramírez, ed., 1992, 25-43) without however claiming that Torres-García achieved any kind of ‘solution’ through these visual experiments. In fact, the grounding insight of my analysis is that aesthetic *mestizaje* should not be subsumed under the heading of ‘identity,’ as a ‘solution,’ – an *Aufhebung* – of contradictions, but rather as the exploration of contradiction in its disruptive potential, in how it precisely eludes clear conceptual grasp

pictographs of the galleon, the fish and the cross, when considered as hypericons, already ambiguate between the pre-Columbian and colonial, the fantasy of primordial purity and the hybridizing labour of history; it is as if the map already ‘illustrates’ the impossibility of constructive universalism’s utopian demand of constructing a new, non-colonial history. Furthermore, the grid ambiguates between the tectonic and the perspectival, between the arrangement and distribution of schematized icons within the picture-plane and the semblance of geographical verisimilitude and cartographic conventionality.

In fact, it is the uneasy syncretism of universal constructivism itself, in its fabrication of its own counter-history, formulated and pictured in resistance to the dominant art historical genealogies, which inevitably shows up its own paradoxical, impossible, and contradictory conceptual grounding. The ontotheological concept holding together this new cosmic, ritual and nostalgic view on art as life, the ‘abstract primitive,’ can never quite fathom the complexity of what is worked out visually, and the term fails to ‘anchor’ the historical density of its pictorial praxis. The visual interlaces the pre-Columbian and post-Columbian to the point of indiscernibility, whereas the conceptual framework pretends to be able to disentangle the post-Columbian from the pre-Columbian. Constructive universalism’s discourse ‘misreads’ its own visual production in attempting to abstract the pre-contact from the post-Columbian in order to make thinkable a return to a pure origin, an origin unmediated through a complex history of scriptural-pictorial economies. Yet, it is this complex superimposition that the images put in evidence. There is a fundamental dissonance/dissidence between the theoretical frame – as the site of a desire for a specific, eidetic meaning the images supposedly encapsulate – and the interpretative demand of the image. It is as if the images counter this wishful thinking by insisting that the pre-Columbian cannot be abstracted to the point

and never ‘settles,’ since it insists on the irreducible moment of the tactile, the sensory, the affective to discursivity of the concept: *mestizaje* is non-discursive, corporeal knowledge, “border gnosis” (Mignolo 2000).

of purity, but that the ‘pre-Columbian’ itself is a construct, an effect of accretion of various – and contradictory, anachronistic – layers of legibility and visibility.⁸⁷

The pictograms themselves already rehearse this overdetermination, which makes them hypericons; they incessantly engender networks of contradictory meanings and associations – a constellation of ever-new images – that counteract any unequivocal conceptual grounding, the grounding constructive universalism hopes for. This is, after all, an image of disorientation, a map of vertigo, of spatiotemporal dislocation showing us how to lose one’s way in a forest of opaque signs. In short, the *Inverted Map* is an anti-map. The ideograms play their part in overdetermining where and when we are; that is to say, this map is not *our* map, all it can do is point to an impossible future where its coordinates will have attained transparency.

⁸⁷ For more on the ‘montage principle’ and the production of visual analogies that constitute the primitivist *modus operandi* of constructive universalism, see Chapter 3.

Chapter 2

2 Manuscription, Graphism, the Hyper-Icon: Writing, Drawing and Painting as the Space of Risk of the Hand

2.1 Introduction: Three Tactics of A-Semiosis: Graphism, Manuscription, Hypericon

This chapter formulates a critique of readings of Torres-García's works - that is to say, almost all readings⁸⁸ - that assume a relation of exemplification - of a continuum, of a *consensus* - between the visual works and the theory of constructive universalism. It is as if the task of art criticism/history were to uphold the theoretical edifice of constructive universalism by making its praxis visible as the 'illustration' of its own conceptual regime. The majority of the literature on Torres-García is written as an apologia of the words of the 'master,' and secure his image as patriarch of Latin American abstraction.

Significant exceptions to this regime of legibility that take the materiality, the non-discursive aesthetic aspects of the work of Torres-García seriously, do exist however, but these are apocryphal to the canon of Torres-García research. One of these is Rosa Sarabia's "Manuscription in *La ciudad sin nombre* by Joaquín Torres-García" (2010, 297-310), which focuses on the embodied praxis of manuscript in Torres-García's novel of 1941, *The City without Name*, as the paradigm case for a possible revision of Torres-García's oeuvre, prompted by its troubled engagement with materiality. The recent exhibition catalogue edited by Mari Carmen Ramírez, *Joaquín Torres-García: Constructing Abstraction with Wood* (2009), focuses on Torres-García's *maderas* as a distinct practice, as an experimental method - a self-pedagogy of the artist with forms and materials - and foregrounds the material engagement with wood as a

⁸⁸ An important qualification is due. I am mainly considering the 'hegemonic' languages of English and French in my discussion of Torres-García. Apart from a substantial amount of Latin American scholarship published in translation in English, French or Dutch catalogues and journals, and the monumental *Torres-García: utopía y transgresión* by Mário H. Gradowczyk (2007) and the equally colossal *Joaquín Torres-García: Sol y luna del arcano* by Adolfo M. Maslach (1998), I have only a fragmented view of publications from Latin America on Torres-García.

‘precarious medium’ for abstraction. This “radical economy of means” resulting in an “uncodified abstract idiom” is what Ramírez refers to as “a *constructed precariousness*” (Ramírez 2009, 40; emphasis in original). The *maderas* are dubbed “experimental pieces,” in which a new Torres-García emerges, an artist excruciatingly true to materiality, “operating within a self-imposed poverty of means,” he “cut, juxtaposed, hand carved, gouged, grooved, burned, or incised the wood of these maderas, always staying true to the wood’s intrinsic qualities and never mixing it with other materials. He then applied oil colour or tempera to highlight or reinforce - never to hide, or worse, to decorate - the wood grain” (ibid., 42). However, such descriptions of protean materiality – the old master as labourer and artisan – does not extend to a revision of constructive universalism itself. By singling out the *maderas* as ‘experimental pieces,’ the integrity of the oeuvre as a whole is preserved, making the wood constructions merely the preparations of a ‘formal solution’ already on the horizon. The editor’s rather enigmatic observation that “the maderas are not merely a stage in the evolution of his [Torres-García’s] theory and practice of Constructive Universalism but rather, the experimental starting point for his development for a paradoxical, albeit *suigeneris*, form of abstraction” (ibid.), is self-contradictory: if the *maderas* stand on their own, why must they be incorporated within such developmental logic? What is a “starting point” if not an *arkhe* towards a *telos* already known in advance? Why must a work be read as an ‘advancement’ in a ‘theory’ in the first place?

Moreover, most studies offer the token admission that Torres-García’s theories are hopelessly contradictory, but fail to give any meaning to this contradiction, except to reassure us that by the 1930s, constructive universalism had ‘resolved’ this contradiction through synthesis. In effect, this tension between legibility and visibility in Torres-García’s oeuvre is never thought through but is always framed through the commonplace binary figuration/abstraction (cf. Rowell 2009; Ramírez 1992, 2009; Paternosto 2001). The scholarship on the oeuvre of Torres-García never truly asks the question of why his theoretical pronouncements are so deeply paradoxical.⁸⁹ The discrepancy between image

⁸⁹ Juan Fló’s essay in *El Taller Torres-García: The school of the South*, “Torres-García: In (and From) Montevideo” is the only study I have come across that tries to make sense of the contradictory moves in

and text is never the occasion for a deeper reflection on the relation between textuality and visuality, and their incommensurability. Instead, an impressive conceptual machinery is deployed, which basically mimics the rhetoric of purity of constructive universalism, in order to account for the contradiction, and thereby restore the equilibrium between the visual and the textual. Most commonly, the contradiction in the text is figured as merely a ‘moment’ toward the formal solution that would be achieved in a later work, which in fact amounts to a glossing over of the contradiction with the benefit of hindsight. To overgeneralize things unduly, the work of Torres-García is always interpreted under the sign of synthesis and solution. It is a reading strategy that will always be able to adduce a counter-quote to dispel a contradiction as merely ‘apparent.’

In addition, all of the studies on constructive universalism fail to grasp the artificiality of the notion of the ‘pre-Columbian,’ as if the pre-Columbian, abstract primordial origin of art that constructive universalism claims as its foundation is not itself the effect of writing and art praxis, of the intersection and *polemos* between regimes of legibility and visibility. The pre-Columbian, abstract tectonic paradigm - and the image of ‘Abstract Man’ as original, re-enchanted, un-alienated, primitive mankind - is not a given but the result of artifice, of pen and paper, of the collage of photographic material: it is as much a product of *poiesis* as the paintings, murals and other works by the hand of Torres-García.⁹⁰ This chapter thus falls within the overall tactic of this study, which is

Torres-García’s body of work, although it too slides back into a formalist account trying to bring the concept of ‘paradox’ back onto the formulation of a painterly problem for which there is a ‘solution,’ i.e., the synthesis between abstraction and figuration in constructive universalism, a solution that can even be dated (1930-32). Cf. Fló 1992, 25-43.

⁹⁰ The artificiality of the pre-Columbian as origin and paradigm informing Torres-García’s work, especially after his return to Montevideo, is only hinted at in the literature on his oeuvre by the revelation that Torres-García did not discover Inca and pre-Inca culture in Montevideo. The possibility that the specific image of the Inca, which constructive universalism claims as its forefather, is itself the effect of the importation and relocation of the indigenous Peruvian – as a primitivist collage figure constructed at the Trocadéro – to the cultural context of Uruguay is never seriously entertained. In addition, the fact that Torres-García never visited the actual archaeological sites even after his return, but instead constructed Andean ‘Abstract Man’ through documentation is not seen as attesting to the artificiality of the notion of origin. Instead, it is seen as evidence of the ‘Genius’ of Torres-García, who was mysteriously – quasi-mystically - in tune with the essence - that is to say, the *eidos* - of the pre-Columbian, and was not confused by the ‘merely’ sensory,

intent on the de-idealization of constructive universalism. The point is to highlight constructive universalism's *mestizaje*, which, given the nature of the paintings - their thick layering of paint, their use of painted-over wood, in short, their insistent materiality - seems almost too absurd a task since its corporeality is so 'in your face,' a corporeality that the discourse of constructive universalism is necessarily blind to, given its esoteric self-conception.⁹¹

This text is written in counterpoint to this master discourse that rings through the majority of scholarly studies on constructive universalism in their failure to think the image as a sensory, material, and indeterminate affective field that has a visual 'logic' of its own, an illogic interrupting the logical field of the discourse of constructive universalism. The double task of this chapter is to circumscribe the sensory field of the work of Torres-García and thereby show how the conceptual infrastructure - the regime of legibility - of constructive universalism is a displacement of what is actually at work in the work of art. My analysis will also put in relief the artifice of the non-mestizo origin, and how constructive universalism's discourse - in its logical field - is undermined by visual tactics that work against any presumed systematicity. These tactics of interruption comprise (1) graphism, (2) manuscript and (3) hyper-iconicity. In the course of the chapter, a wholly different image of constructive universalism than hitherto theorized will emerge out of the interaction between the three. Before starting the analysis proper, I will first outline the major claims associated with each tactic. It is important to note that I separate the three for analytical reasons only; through the course of the discussion, it will become apparent that they cannot be distinguished in a strict manner, as they work in

'superficial,' visual aspects of their art. Margit Rowell insists that Torres-García's "lack of concrete spatial experience of the monuments" even allowed him to have a more 'profound' – that is to say, 'spiritual' – knowledge, since "his understanding of them was cerebral and intuitive. One might say that he knew them intimately, but as ideas and abstractions; that was his mode of operating" (Rowell, "Torres-García and 'Primitivism' in Paris," in Ramírez, ed., 2009, 118-29; 128). What I argue throughout the following chapters is that he knew the pre-Columbian intimately because he materially co-created the pre-contact aesthetics through his research and art praxis, through the 'manipulation' and framing of documentary material, and not through quasi-religious epiphanies. See the Conclusion for a short sketch of the role of his documentation.

⁹¹ I will discuss this in more detail in section 2.2 of this chapter.

tandem within much of Torres-García's work. However, hypericonicity can be distinguished from manuscript-graphism, in that it tends to the moment of over-signification through the anarchy of visual analogies, while manuscript-graphism tends to refer to the working over of the icon, its treatment, its 'style' and the implication of the hand. However, what binds the three is that, taken together, indiscernibility is the effect of their interaction and brings out the "a-semiotic," thereby engendering a "general economy" of interpretive possibilities.

The General Economy of (A-)Semiosis

With 'a-semiosis' I refer to the indeterminacy of "art's appearing" (Adorno 1997) as an affective, sensory manifold that envelops the eye and forces thought to draw out the image's frame of legibility (conceived as its 'form'). In this sense, my use of the term 'a-semiosis' can be read as a contraction of Félix Guattari's idea of "a-signifying semiosis" in the basic sense of a dynamic "matter-form relation, which extracts complex forms from chaotic material" (Guattari 1995, 28).⁹² Put differently, a-semiosis can be seen as the *material* condition of possibility of semiosis. Faced with the work of art, thought is forced to articulate – to give form to – the enigma of the visual, and the discourses it enunciates in response give form to the work, thereby accumulating materiality in a process of immanent proliferation (cf. Adorno 1997, 86-88). Graphism - and here it differs markedly from Torres-García's theory of *grafismo* as a neo-classical theory of the

⁹² That being said, I am not engaging Guattari's intricate distinction between a-semiotic natural encoding, signifying semiologies and diagrammatic, a-signifying semiotics. What I instead focus on is the general materiality of diagrammatology, whereby I take the liberty of 'confounding' a-signifying semiosis and a-semiosis. In fact, since I will demonstrate in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 that indiscernibility is the effect of the 'inconstancy' of neo-baroque diagrammatics, operative distinctions become inoperative in the confounding flux and incessant recalibrations of legibilities and visibilities. This holds true most of all for the distinction between the "natural" and "artificial" as it pertains to the border between a-semiotic natural encodings that "do not involve any kind of human language" (Watson 2009, 47) and the artifice of diagrammatic a-signifying semiotics – "used in information technology, science and the arts transmitting ideas, functions, or intensities with no need to signify any meaning" (ibid.) – and signification proper, which comprises "signifying semiologies" and "symbolic semiologies" (ibid.). The neo-baroque ethos insists on the artificiality of nature, which means that an "a-semiotic natural encoding" must be seen as the effect of signification, reified as 'natural,' biological, empirically 'real.' I will focus on the diagrammatic, a-signifying semiotic in Chapter 4, as well as in Chapter 7 (section 7.1), where I read antropofagia as a mode of diagrammatological thought engaging in the relay of a-signification and meaning. For an exhaustive discussion of Guattari's 'nomenclature' of semiosis, see Watson 2009, 15-54.

self-sufficient symbol (cf. Benjamin 1977) - is, as I will argue below, precisely this principle of centrifugality in that it brings into the open a “sensory field” that points outside the confines of *grafismo*’s logical field (cf. Lyotard 2011).⁹³ Hypericonicity awakens the ‘demon of analogy’ constructive universalism is so concerned with anaesthetizing since every pictogram brings to mind another, and this anarchic production of resemblance is what constructive universalism can only see as a ‘bastardization.’ Finally, manuscript, through the ‘slips’ of the hand, makes words slide over into images, adding visual opacity to its glottographic makeup. Through the dynamic of these three tactics, the constructive universalist work of art appears as the space where the sayable and the seeable come into contact to engage in a dynamic *ars combinatoria*.⁹⁴ Anticipating my discussion of the neo-baroque in Part 2, it can be said that whereas Torres-García’s theory adheres to the neo-classical symbol (cf. Benjamin 1977), his visual works offer the baroque counter-claim of dispersal.⁹⁵

In their attentiveness to moments of incoherence, graphism, manuscript and hypericonicity allow an approach to the visual work from the perspective of an indeterminate, non-signifying materiality with a view to accommodating a more “general economy” of the sign that does not shirk from broaching the issue of aesthetic non-sense. I am using the phrase “general economy” the way Derrida (1997, 102-138) develops it in his reading of Georges Bataille, showing that, rather than amounting to a broadening of Hegelian *Aufhebung* as Bataille had intended, it constitutes a radical and devastating deconstruction of dialectics. Following Bataille, Derrida casts his critique of the hermeneutic process of Hegelian *Aufhebung* by figuring it as a “restricted economy” that limits “itself to conservation, to circulation and self-reproduction as the production of

⁹³ I will explain the distinction between the two in Section 2.3 and 2.4.

⁹⁴ I am invoking Foucault’s analysis of *Las Meninas* (1970) and the way his critical stance, bringing out the Adornian ‘spirit’ of the painting, engages the complex, unstable interplay between the sayable and the seeable. I will come back to his ekphrasis of Velázquez’s painting in chapter 7 (section 7.1), in the context of my reading of the neo-baroque aesthetic of antropofagia.

⁹⁵ The baroque will be discussed in chapter 5.

meaning” (Derrida 1997, 107).⁹⁶ Rather than ‘enlarging’ the scope of the Hegelian operation of *Aufhebung* into a more ‘generous’ model, Derrida maintains that Bataille’s contribution lies in exposing the “ruse” (104) of dialectics in that it cannot allow non-sense, a-semiosis, as the “absolute sacrifice of meaning” (112), amongst its midst. The general economy of semiosis, as a “heedless sacrifice of presence and meaning” (108), a “potlatch of signs” (127), shows the blind spot of Hegelian dialectics: it always tries to overcome silence through discourse, through the incessant, petit bourgeois “business” with meaning, through a stifling “seriousness” (107). In tracing “the sovereign silence which interrupts articulated language” (Bataille, qtd. in Derrida 1998, 114), Bataille’s laughter cracks open the circularity of the discursive edifice of *Aufhebung*, deregulating the smooth flow of signifiers and signifieds. Radical non-meaning, radical non-identity shows up Hegelian negativity as merely abstract and empty, as always-already inscribed within a teleology where the negation of a negation always yields a new positive, a new identity.⁹⁷

Sacrifice, to give without return - epitomized in the absurdity of death where the gift of life is brought back to earth, without transcendence awaiting to ‘compensate’ for a life lived⁹⁸ - is what Hegelian *Aufhebung* cannot think since its image of thought is predicated on the absolute priority of the discursive. The “sovereign silence” marks “an opening, by means of an irruption suddenly uncovering the limit of discourse” (112). As Bataille writes

⁹⁶ Cf. Jacques Derrida, “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve,” in Botting and Wilson, eds, 1997, trans. Allan Bass, 102-138.

⁹⁷ In this sense, Adorno’s critique of Hegelian *Aufhebung* in *Negative Dialectics* (Adorno 1973), through a negativity that resists subsumption and holds on to the ‘thick’ materiality of an affective, sensory stratum, shows an affinity with Derrida’s.

⁹⁸ It is here that Benjamin’s notion of allegory resonates. The corpse, as the figure that binds the allegorical, is also the point of non-sense that stitches the world together, a precarious organic remainder that makes possible the mournful hope for a life after biological death (cf. Benjamin 1977, 217-18). It is also here that Benjamin differs by holding onto the possibility of redemption, however minimal. In fact, as the catastrophe of human history is progressing, heaping up its debris and atrocities, the hope for redemption and transcendence grows at the same time its likeliness recedes: urgency rises as the angel recedes riding the wave of progress. See my comments on the flight of Benjamin’s ‘angel of history’ as an emblem for the paradoxical, dialectical waxing of transcendence in Chapter 1.

the *general economy*... makes apparent that excesses of energy are produced, and that by definition, these excesses cannot be utilized. The excessive energy can be lost without the slightest aim, consequently without any meaning. It is this useless, senseless loss that *is* sovereignty (qtd. in Derrida 1997, 122; emphasis in original).

The ‘othering’ of *grafismo* through graphism, the opaque visuality of manuscript and the sensuous proliferation of graphisms through hypericonicity constitute the excessive play of a-semiosis: Torres-García’s praxis holds together too many other images, too many associations and visual reverberations that cannot be accommodated by an overarching theory. However, as excessive as Torres-García’s visual art may be, the a-semiotic must always be thought: even ‘non-sense’ will *retrospectively* be invested with meaning, even if only to be designated *as* ‘nonsense.’ Even if, in the flash of an instance, an a-semiotic expenditure overflows the circuit of meaning, the link between meaning and non-meaning is what the work of art demands to be thought. The work of art takes on form through legibility, and it is in this sense that *il n’y a pas de hors-texte* (Derrida 1967, 227): visibility is always-already enmeshed in visibility, while on the other hand, legibility is always saturated with the visual. The frame of legibility that allows for the encounter with the painting’s “sovereign silence” to take on contours – form – enters, as Adorno rightly points out (cf. Adorno 1997, 87), the material makeup of the work of art. There is no ‘blanket,’ ‘brute’ materiality: form, as the mediation of thingliness that makes the work of art already more than a mere thing, is immanent to its materiality (cf. *ibid.*, 86-92). What I hope to demonstrate in this section is that graphism, hypericonicity and manuscript allow constructive universalism to escape the confines of the restrictive, classical economy of the sign and to make another meaning speak forth.

Graphism

Torres-García sometimes uses the name *grafismo*,⁹⁹ ‘graphism’ to designate the ideogrammatic system of constructive universalism. As I will argue in this chapter, and

⁹⁹ I will reserve the term *grafismo* for Torres-García’s conception of the system and classification of pictograms, i.e., the idea of systematicity underlying his conception of ‘picture-writing,’ while I will reserve ‘graphism’ - as derived from Leroi-Gourhan - as a name for the “language of sight” and its undermining of Torres-García’s demand for systematicity concerning the *modus significandi* of constructive universalism’s pictographic organization. That this distribution of *grafismo*/graphism is

contrary to what Torres-García postulates as a transparent pictorial system, or at least posits as an image of systematicity itself (even though the precise meaning of the pictograms may elude us owing to its esoteric nature), graphism is not a system of signs, it is not an iconology or symbology. Most scholars of the work of *el maestro* echo the painter's own conviction. There is a consensus that the pictograms are 'sign-like' and comprise a repertoire of stable signifieds, as if Torres-García's tabulation of icons were homologous with Saussure's dyadic schema of the sign.¹⁰⁰ Instead, what graphism shows is the very limit of systematicity, and the futility of "the attempt to set up a semiotics of art totally conditioned by the category of the sign, and by the hypothesis of the axiomatic interdependence of image and concept" (Damisch 2009, 240). Furthermore, as the title of one of his paintings, *Grafismo mágico* (Figure 2.1), indicates, graphism comprises a visual tactic within Torres-García's construction of a primordial plane of a-semiosis. It is this plane that Torres-García never allowed to surface directly onto the logical field of his discourse, but which one can read between the lines through the rhythms of inconsistencies between his individual texts. His corpus is one of contradictions, and the latter deconstruct his quest for a 'formal solution' posed by the 'problems' of his art works. Rather than a self-contained grid (Figure 2.2 and 2.3) of pictorial signification, graphism reveals the desire to create an *analogon* with a pre-scriptural, pre-iconological economy. Eventually, graphism shatters the autonomy of the pictographic table: it attests to a *mestizo aisthesis* where the boundaries between icon, symbol and index are blurred to the point of illegibility, of maximum density.

confusing is no coincidence: *grafismo* itself already undermines its own pretence to systematicity precisely because it is open to a reading premised on a-semiotic visibility and the gestural that informs Leroi-Gourhan's notion.

¹⁰⁰ See Rowell (1986), Ramírez (1992, 2004).



Figure 2.1 Joaquín Torres-García, *Grafismo mágico*, 1938. Oil on board, 100 x 87 cm. Private collection, New York. [<http://www.christies.com/lotfinderimages/d48075/d4807533r.jpg>].

Manuscription

The validation of the hand in the “language of sight” (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 195) is what is at work in Torres-García’s writings. In their anachronistic insistence on penmanship in the age of typographic reproducibility, his texts foreground “the materiality of the ink and the corporeality of the hand-drawn line” (Sarabia 2010, 298). Rosa Sarabia coins the term *manuscription* to refer to Torres-García’s “regressive gesture” that “made *hand*-writing (quite literally, ‘manu-scripture’) into an art, a craft/penmanship” (ibid.). “La Regla abstracta” is such a manuscripted, theoretical text that I will discuss below, in the hopes of bringing out Torres-García’s involuntary tactic of short-circuiting glottographic

writing through a-semiotic iconicity. This tactic operates a sensory field that questions - parodies, in fact - the 'law' of the word, as well as the legitimacy of the logical field of the 'abstract rule' as the doctrinal core of constructive universalism: the art made under the banner of constructive universalism deconstructs its own rhetoric.

Hypericon

In addition to graphism and manuscript as tactics within a mestizo aesthesis, one can view Torres-García's pictograms as hypericons.¹⁰¹ This is another way of bringing out the a-semiotic in his work, but in way markedly different from framing the pictograms as graphisms. Graphism allows one to approach the 'symbols' of *grafismo* from the perspective of an indeterminate, non-signifying pointing outside of the frame, as generating a sensory space of 'outsidedness.'

By contrast, the notion of hypericon allows the pictograms to become visible as overdetermined condensations of other icons, in which the discrete symbols of Torres-García's *grafismo* turn into 'snapshots' of a whole "constellation"¹⁰² of visual tracings. This is in fact already hinted at by Torres-García himself, who, by presenting his pictograms as the stripping down of icons of different times and regions (Egyptian, Inca, Mesopotamian, Hebrew, masonic pictograms) into their universal essence and univocal meaning, opens the way for considering them as accretions of different space-times. His system of 'symbolic forms' thereby topples under the weight of visual associations. Furthermore, it is the unruly element of resemblance - of an almost irrational hyper-iconicity - that destabilizes Torres-García's notion of abstraction itself, and that breaks open the system of constructive universalism, and exposes how the moment of

¹⁰¹ My use of the term 'hypericon' differs markedly from W. J. T. Mitchell's (cf. 1994, 49ff). Analogous to hypertext, my use of hypericon refers to the image as a site of potential proliferation of pictures through the anarchic work of visual analogies, of likenesses amongst images rather than referring to, through resemblance, things in the world. What W. J. T. Mitchell calls hypericon I would simply call meta-icon, as a reflection on the status of the image as having theoretical, epistemic effects.

¹⁰² For a discussion of the concept of constellation employed by Adorno (1973) and Benjamin (1977), and as it is appropriated in the catalogue of the *Inverted Utopias* (2004) exhibit, see Chapter 4.

abstraction is built upon the mestizo¹⁰³ foundation. Due to its more general scope and the fact that hypericonicity envelops the previous two tactics, I will devote a separate chapter to it (Chapter 3).

2.2 *Grafismo*, or the Esoteric Fantasy of Systematicity in Exoteric Times

In this section, I will develop a summary of some of the main tenets of constructive universalism. I will recreate its self-understanding as it pertains to the presentation of the system of *grafismo* that it claims as its own, and how this system has been elucidated in the literature on the subject, which, incidentally, largely replicates the idealist (Neo-Platonist) tenor of Joaquín Torres-García's theoretical formulations.¹⁰⁴ The following section will provide a critique of *grafismo* and the very idea of systematicity it is meant

¹⁰³ Mestizo is 'decadent,' to use Torres-García's own organicist metaphor. His usage of this term to denounce the impurity of an indigenous art - the Indo-American - that has adopted foreign - European - models is ironic, given that organicist metaphors ('growth,' 'birth,' 'decay,' etc.) have such a respectable pedigree in Western art historical discourse. A further irony is that the designation 'decadent' in art history was usually reserved for the Baroque as a way to signal the degeneration of Renaissance principles into pure aesthetic frivolity and meaningless decoration (cf. Lambert 2008, 32-33). Given Torres-García's antipathy to the colonial Hispanic baroque, the association of degeneracy, decadence and mestizo with the baroque becomes evident. Incidentally, the Brazilian movement of antropofagia will relish this supposed 'decadence,' and will promote the colonial baroque as their paradigm (cf. Part 2, Chapter 5).

¹⁰⁴ See Carmen-Ramírez (1992), Llorens (2002, 173-197), Paternosto (1996; 2001), Gradowczyk (2007, 218-230), Rowell (2009). These accounts largely replicate, expand upon and claim to 'solve' some of the contradictions within Torres-García's conception of *grafismo*. They also provide ways of reading that claim to extend the logic of the 'solution' to his entire oeuvre. These interpretations take Torres-García's theoretical writings as providing the sole key concepts for an adequate, 'correct' reading of the visual works, since what is presupposed is a relation of exemplification between theory and the art of which it speaks. The work of the critic then consists in aligning the work with the theory, and effecting a more adequate relation of correspondence between the two. What all these readings thus have in common, with a few notable exceptions (amongst them Sarabia 2010; Block de Behar 2001) in addition to signalling that through the sheer volume of Torres-García's writing he ('understandably') ends up contradicting himself here and there, is that they merely focus on the logical field of *grafismo*. Most critical works on Torres-García's oeuvre treat the individual works as units in a system with distinct subsets - of 'immature' and more 'mature' style periods. They leave no room for approaching pictograms - and by extension the image as such - in their visuality, apart from noting how they are integrated, subsumed within the picture-plane of the grid. The latter is an equally problematic assumption since it can only see in the grid a repressive agent, locking in 'discrete' pictograms in tables and cells, which again, following the linguistic imperialism of such semiotic readings, presupposes another 'given,' namely that these pictograms are discrete signifying elements, and work analogously to the linguistic sign. An alternative is to conceive the grid in terms of a productive constraint (Cf. Baetens 1997, 1-14), that is to say, as a material condition of possibility for experimentation.

to uphold by turning away from constructive universalism as discursive formation and turning to the works in their visual opacity as against Torres-García's 'rhetoric of purity' (cf. Cheetham 1991).

Prior to his return to the South, Torres-García had already elaborated an architectonic of grid and pictogram. From 1929 onwards, Torres-García started using the golden section as the organizing principle for the gridding of his canvases (cf. Rowell 1985, 12). This mathematical ratio, which he saw instantiated in archaic cultures across the earth and throughout a vast expanse of time, provided him with a key of legibility that runs counter to the dominant understanding of the modernist grid as the exploration of the autonomy of the painterly medium. Torres-García deemed the esoteric as fundamental to his praxis, which puts him in close proximity to Kandinsky and Mondriaan, who both associated abstraction with the spiritual in their 'rhetoric of purity' (Cheetham 1991), in counterpoint to its association with 'base' aestheticism. On the initiation of Torres-García into mysticism, Rowell writes that

it may have been the Spanish painter Luis Fernández who first introduced Torres-García to the Golden Section. He was a freemason and versed in many kinds of esoteric knowledge, including the Golden Section, the magic of numbers, medieval symbology, etc. Fernández used to take [Torres-García] to medieval churches in Paris, and not only decipher the iconography of the sculpted motifs but also reveal the hidden arithmetical laws which governed their placements and relationships (Rowell 1985, 12).

In effect, although the esoteric was central to Torres-García's project of imbuing abstraction with a metaphysical orientation,

the constructive label eventually served 'to mask' Torres-García's search for an underlying metaphysical order that resulted, for him, from the synthesis of Platonism, Catholicism, and - after 1928 - both Freemasonry and esoteric philosophy. ... He distinguished between a type of all-encompassing 'constructive' art ... which he clearly favored - and the tendency in vogue at the time, namely, that art be based on proportions and measurements, the latter of which he found objectionable as being nothing more than a pure aestheticism. (Ramírez 2009, 35).

The golden section, and by extension his use of the grid as it was grounded in the divine ratio, ensured painting's fundamental heteronomy. Torres-García conceived of painting as but one activity within the larger overall set of plastic activity. In its turn, the latter was

but one facet within the broad humanist doctrine of constructive universalism, in which geometry was seen as the most basic of human expressions, with visual art constituting but a minimal contribution to a wider cosmic configuration of meaning. Painting is thus conceived as a metaphysical exercise, as the reawakening of man's most primitive urge, i.e., the drive to geometrize, obscured by so many ages of 'bastardizing' mimeticism, but which the avant-garde, and Neo-Plastic experimentation in particular, finally revived.

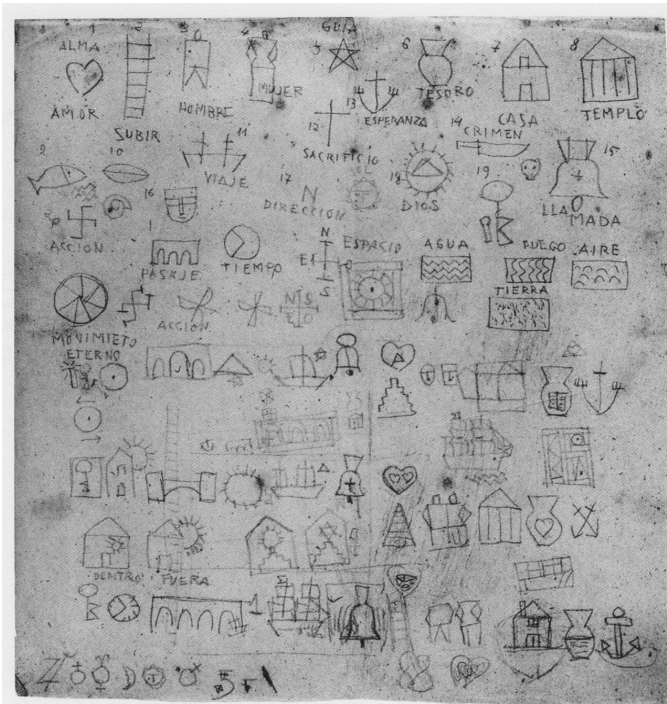


Figure 2.2 Torres-García, *Symbols*, c1930, Pencil on paper, 15 x 10 cm. Collection Torres-García family, Montevideo. [Kattouw, 180].

For Torres-García, first man, primitive man, is abstract man: authentic man was not born through language, through writing or speech, or even the use of tools. Man was born from the desire to create spatial relations, and confer meaning onto these relations: “for the primitive, to think is to *geometrize*.”¹⁰⁵ The image of the primitive in constructive universalism is the result of an inversion, or rather, of a revaluation of

¹⁰⁵ Joaquín Torres-García, “Excerpts from *Metaphysics of Indo-American Prehistory*,” in Ramírez, ed., 1992, 70-74; 74.

homologies. The primitive comes close to the academic, classical ideal. Once the ‘other’ of this classical ideal, the primitive is now conflated with the Ur-Classical; once the image of unreason, the primitive becomes the incarnation of reason and ideality itself. Within this conception, the Amerindian embodies the vitalism of reason, with geometry standing for a primordial *élan vital*: “the Indian was a geometer.”¹⁰⁶ This, in fact, can be construed as a double inversion, as a mirroring of the mirroring device. It is a *mise en abîme* in which primitivism and classicism, as the dialectic, dynamic poles of a European cultural self-image, are conflated to the point of indistinguishability: the reflection can no longer be differentiated from the ‘source’ – much like the echo can be heard as if preceding the ‘original’ voice in an echo chamber, effecting a confusion of cause and effect (i.e., overdetermination).¹⁰⁷ Assuming, with Frances Connelly (1995, 9) that Pablo Picasso’s *Demoiselles D’Avignon* does not mark the origin, but rather the belated crystallization of the prehistory of primitivism as the paradigm of Europe’s other, Torres-García’s elevation of the primitive as rational-vitalist, geometric ‘Abstract Man’ takes on an ironic dimension. The consolidation of primitive art - the craze for *art negre*,¹⁰⁸ the exotic, the spontaneous, as ways of injecting new vitality into a sclerotic tradition (a new vitality it owed to the opening of the veins of the colonies)¹⁰⁹ - in Europe during the first decades of the twentieth century had been long in preparation. The irruption of *Les Demoiselles* on the scene was but the belated culminating point of a development rooted in an academic classicism that had already found its first systematic formulation with the

¹⁰⁶ Joaquín Torres-García, “The New Art of America,” in Ramírez, ed., 1992, 75-80; 80.

¹⁰⁷ This already foreshadows Torres-García’s ‘baroquing’ of the grid, with which I will close this work (see the Conclusion). Incidentally, *Chambre d’échos* was the title of an exposition presenting the work of Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão, in which the acoustic effects of the device are portrayed as paradigmatic of the artist’s Baroque sensibilities, and as a continuation of the legacy of the *antropofagia* movement (cf. Sollers 2005). Furthermore, the title of the exposition refers to a book by one of the most important theoreticians of the neo-baroque, i.e., Severo Sarduy’s *Barroco*, whose opening chapter is entitled “Cámara de ecos” (1974, 13-22), with the echo chamber functioning as emblem of the neo-baroque aesthetic. For more details on the neo-baroque, see Chapter 5 (section 5.2.1). For a discussion on antropofagia in relation to the work of Varejão, see Chapter 7

¹⁰⁸ Incidentally, Torres-García also briefly experimented with the iconography of primitive African art so prevalent at the time in Paris (cf. Rowell 2009, 41-42).

¹⁰⁹ The restricted scope of this work does not allow me to address the wider topic of the link between primitivism, modern art, and colonialism. For more on the relation between primitivism, modernity, and modern art, see Barkan and Bush 1995, Errington 1998, Flam and Deutch 2003, Hiller 1991, Philippou 2004 and Torgovnick 1990 amongst others.

publication in 1725 of Giambattista Vico's *La Scienza nuova*, which contains "the first crucial definition of 'primitive' art" (Connelly 1995, 10).¹¹⁰ This shows that "the principle framework of ideas that defined 'primitive' art was that of the classical tradition as institutionalized in academic art throughout Europe. The classical norm cast the primitive as a dark mirror of itself" (ibid., 9). Dubbing the Renaissance as 'degenerate,' as 'impure' and 'decadent' (cf. below), Torres-García de-classicizes - primitivizes - Europe, while classicizing, and strangely Europeanizing the formerly 'savage,' 'illiterate' Amerindian primitive, as if de-colonization could be effected through a sheer excess of colonization. Torres-García's highly ambiguous gesture also inverts the teleological story of civilization: first, there was order, abstraction, and then there was decline, decadence, chaos, mixture, figuration, and the over-civilized. The instinctual, the unconscious, is thus also subjected to a classicist reformulation. The primal urge is the urge for establishing meaningful spatial relations and their encoding in abstract patterns. On this account, geometry has deep metaphysical implications. It is expressive of inherent qualitative differences, and is not a merely formal instrument of measurement and composition. For Torres-García, the unconscious is the will to structure, and art is the reactivation of a primary *Kunstwollen* as geometry.¹¹¹

This goes to the heart of the term 'constructive universalism,' which seeks to distinguish itself from the functionalism of Russian constructivism, as well as from what Torres-García deemed an empty formalist understanding of construction and abstraction, leading to an "art based on proportions and measurements, which he found objectionable

¹¹⁰ It is doubly belated since, although he had finished it in 1907, Picasso's "Philosophical Brothel" (cf. Steinberg 1988), *The Brothel of Avignon* as it was originally named by Picasso (cf. Frascina 1993, 109) - who had only shown it to a circle of friends - was not publicly displayed until 1916. Art critic André Salmon, who organized the exposition, baptized it *Les Femmes d'Alger* (cf. Miller 2001, 89-90). Although it only took on canonical status after its acquisition and display in 1939 at the newly founded MOMA, *Les Femmes d'Alger* "had a considerable impact within a particular group" of avant-garde artists prior to 1916 (Frascina 1993, 105).

¹¹¹ An in-depth study of the possible sources in Torres-García's aesthetic theory for the strand of vitalism, as well as his conception of decadence as he equates it with figuration, is yet to be undertaken.

as being nothing more than a pure aestheticism” (Ramírez 2009, 35).¹¹² Against functionalism and aestheticism, constructive universalism, being “closer to Malevich’s mysticism and Mondrian’s spiritualism” (ibid.), positioned itself as a metaphysical solution that sought to get “rid of decadent realism and restore the lost abstract order to art” (ibid., 46). This meant that, in the lexicon of constructive universalism,

terms such as ‘constructive,’ ‘constructor,’ and construction took on connotations that significantly diverged from the artistic terminology of the period. Torres-García observed, for instance: ‘Precisely that which can be named construction is, indeed, the realization of that esoteric notion of totality’ (ibid., 35).

If the grid constitutes the ‘deep structural grammar’ of his system, with the golden section endowing it with its metaphysical aura, as index of “the esoteric notion of totality,” then Torres-García’s network of pictograms – which he dubbed ‘symbols’ – constitutes its ‘deep structural semantics.’ Both grid and pictogram are placed on the same metaphysical plane. The pictograms are interwoven within the grid, engendering a metaphysical fabric, a hieroglyphic textile, tectonic art. The pencil drawing *Symbols* (Figure 2.2), a classificatory schema of pictorial symbols,¹¹³ gives shape to this plane of equivalence between grid and ideogram: the structuring of the pictograms is itself presented in the form of a grid, in a tabular configuration of symbol-genera (triangle, heart, fish) and species. Conversely, the grid itself becomes a form rather than a structuring principle: the intersecting of the horizontal and the vertical – their bisecting constituting the sign of the cross – is itself replicated within *Form-Symbol* (Figure 2.3), as standing for ‘dirección,’ ‘espacio’ – the very principles of geometry and structuration that constructive universalism posits as primordial, as holding together all diversity.

¹¹² In his denunciation of aestheticism and what he considered the over-emphasis on sensuality in certain avant-garde art forms (surrealism in particular), Torres-García found validation in the ‘rhetoric of purity’ (cf. Cheetham 1991) of Kandinsky, Mondrian and Van Doesburg.

¹¹³ In his essay “Torres-García in America: Art as Mission,” Jorge Castillo quite helpfully – since no other publication has given them these titles – renames Figure 2.2 and 2.3 as *Inventory of Symbols* and *Classification of Symbols*, respectively (in Kattouw 1991, 180-181). The words classification and inventory are apt ways of getting at the desire for systematicity – of the classification, tabulation and ‘gridding’ of the esoteric – inherent in Torres-García’s *grafismo* and accounts that try to codify it even further.

In fact, the classification and inventory of ideograms into a universal cosmic grammar and semantics (Figure 2.2 and 2.3) presents the consolidation of a regime of legibility. Within this deep semantics, disparate individual pictograms – ranging from the register of the Inca, the medieval, the masonic, as well as including schematic representations of emotions, and pictograms alluding to modern life – cluster around three sign-genera and are accorded a corresponding value, an intrinsic meaning, with the rectangle signifying reason, and the heart as symbol for the passions, the sentiments. The fish stands for nature and the instinctual, and is indicative of the synthesis between the intuitive and the purely conceptual.¹¹⁴ Torres-García moulded his humanist doctrine of ‘Abstract Man’ with its tripartite division after an eclectic trajectory combining masonic theory, medieval symbology, Pythagorean doctrine and the magic of numbers, as well as his own theories on Indo-American metaphysics (cf. Maslach 1992, 149-163). Barbara Duncan gives an account of the interaction of the organization of the grid and the placement of the discrete pictograms, and the metaphysical implications constructive universalism attaches to this interaction in terms of the drama of correspondences between macrocosm, mesocosmos and microcosm, the magnetic, animal and mineral.¹¹⁵

In Universal Constructivism the symbolic value of form is basic. ... The combination of these elements [i.e. “the structure, the spiritual content, and technique”] is in itself emblematic of the philosophical idea of ‘totality,’ which implies the unity between the artist as constructor and the cosmic order of the universe. This combination signifies the joining of the mental, emotional, and physical realms. ... In Universal Constructivism, this process of structuring is guided by the artist’s reason and intellect ([triangle] Δ) the macrocosmos of his being. Inspired by his emotions ([heart] ♥), his intuitive manipulation of the paint and ‘toning’ of the colours are due to his unique inner spirit. This equally measured aspect of the form brings the magnetic spiritual quality, the mystery of the intangible, into his work and represents the mesocosmos of the soul. The intrinsic, earthy quality of the concrete materials that the artist chooses comes from the natural world, the microcosmos, which includes the animal, vegetable, and mineral categories ([fish] ♣). Thus each work has its own symbolic significance and is in itself an echo of Torres-García’s idea of the cosmic plan (Duncan 1974, 87).

¹¹⁴ Constructive universalism’s “three key symbols - triangle, heart, and fish - represent intellect, sentiment and instinct, respectively” (De Torres 2009, 90).

¹¹⁵ Barbara Duncan provides an exhaustive account - a veritable taxonomy - of the multitude of “spiritual meanings” attached to the discrete pictograms, cf. Duncan (1974, 85-96)

Reminiscent of the Platonic division of the soul into the appetitive, rational and spirited, while echoing the Trinitarian doctrine, the classification and inventory of ideograms is the result of highly idiosyncratic amalgamation of discrete sign systems. It sets out an encyclopaedic domain of associated pictorial signs mined from an eclectic array of epistemes and doctrines. This juxtaposition of heterogeneous scraps, with theory originating in the collage of disparate world views, artefacts, styles and historical periods, is shown to be held together by an overarching, anchoring concept: ‘Abstract Man.’ Constructive universalism “represents the growth of the tradition of *Abstract Man*, the continuum of man’s development through primitive, early Greek, Egyptian, pre-Columbian, medieval, and modern times (universal man seen as the link between the universe and the concrete individual)” (ibid., 92; italics in original). The classification of the symbolic universe of constructive universalism is the articulation of Torres-García’s ideogrammatic theory. The latter is predicated on the tracing of correspondences between diverse pictorial traditions so as to ground the notion of ‘Abstract Man.’ This conceptual construct is made visible through a discourse that reads the manifestations of the master concept back into geometric expressions spanning all continents and cultures past and present. Art becomes the metaphysics of the purity of the classical ‘symbol’ (cf. Benjamin 1977): it is made to testify to the truth of the ontotheology of abstraction as vital principle. What is crystallized as a timeless and unlocalizable, spaceless essence – a universal pictorial repertoire shared by all of humanity – is subsequently mobilized as the originating platform for a new Pan-American tradition, of which constructive universalism was to be the herald.¹¹⁶ The universal folds back into particularity.

¹¹⁶ This is similar to Van Doesburg’s, Mondriaan’s and Kandinsky’s search for timeless, universal plastic forms that supposedly facilitate communion with the noumenal. Torres-García considers the notion of ideogram in its literal, Platonic sense: they are drawings of the Ideas. As such, constructive universalism’s notion of the pictogram as ideogram voices the central paradox between materiality and ideality of the rhetoric of purity of abstraction, depending as it does on “a transcendental absolute that denies art’s materiality” (Cheetham 1991, 119).

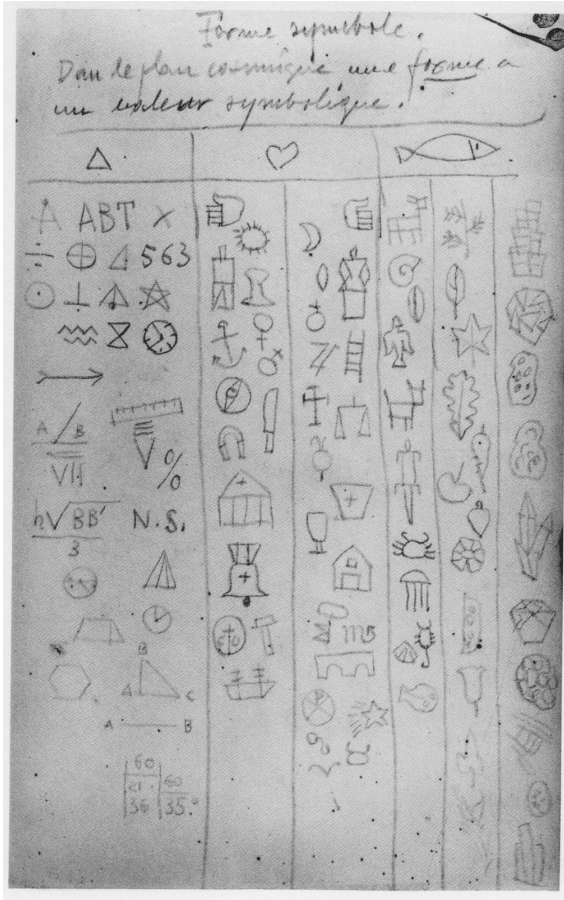


Figure 2.3 Torres-García, *Form-Symbol: In the Cosmic Plane a Form Has a Symbolic Value*, c1930, Pencil on paper, 22 x 14 cm. Collection Torres-García family. [Barbara Duncan, *Joaquín Torres-García, 1874-1949: Chronology and Catalogue of the Family Collection* (Austin: The Art Museum, 1974), 88].

The structural homology that spans epochs and continents – purportedly evidenced in the use of the grid and the golden section, as well as homomorphisms taken to manifest secret geometric knowledge – is supplemented by the use of pictograms, which all share in a “universal semantic system” (Ramírez 1992, 263). Resemblance is figured on an ideal plane, and does not concern visual affinities, but deep spiritual, structural correspondences providing the seemingly boundless clustering of pictorial elements taken from disparate traditions with a deeper, centripetal rationale. As Mari Carmen Ramírez (1992, 263) puts it:

In Torres-García's constructive universalism, an Egyptian work of art shared a similar set of structural characteristics with a pre-Columbian piece or a work of the modern period, since their structure responded to the same abstract principle.

It is the invisible, the noumenal, that ultimately grounds the appearance of pictorial signs: the latter all serve as proof of the primordial will to geometry, the will to effect meaningful relations between signifying elements (the pictograms) through an overall structure (the grid): the idea of structure trumps all. In a tautological move, Torres-García offers his own paintings as the very proof of his theory, as if his own work carries force of argument. It is adduced as the exemplification of the same impulse that reportedly governed Greek geometric-archaic art, the construction of Egyptian monuments and Inca abstraction, which are all cast as terms in the induction of primordial 'Abstract Man.'

That this 'Abstract Man' was anything but unlocalizable, but precisely grounded in the elevation of the 'discovery' of Western planar, two-dimensional geometry - effectively making Euclid, and not the Inca, the 'patron saint' of constructive universalism - is an irony Torres-García was blind to because of his over-investment in the Western notion of the universal, and his allegiance to classicism. As opposed to the avant-garde movements in Paris at the time he formulated the tenets of his constructive universalism, he did not conceive his theory in opposition to academicism but as a *continuation*, a further *perfecting*, of the classical tradition. Constructive universalism would be an *ultra-classicism* purifying the classical ideal of its figurative excess. Borrowing from Walter Mignolo's insights into the colonial ideology of the universal, it can be said that Torres-García's use of the 'universal' evinces the same elevation of the local onto the plane of the general and the prescriptive.¹¹⁷ Torres-García never repudiated his academic background; he always remained faithful to his training at the Barcelona Academy, as well as the ideals informing his early classicist works. The classical tradition - the Mediterranean, as well as the Greek *arche* of geometry - provided him with a regime of legibility that could only see continuation in the face of rupture, tradition at a time when the very idea of tradition was being questioned. His classicizing of the Indo-

¹¹⁷ Cf. Walter Mignolo's *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000). I provide a short characterization of Mignolo's view in Chapter 1, section 1.3.

American primitive is equally a disciplining of the primitive (the anti-classical) through the classicist scriptural-pictorial economy, which amounts to a doubling of cultural colonization, of re-making the structural other (unreason figured as the ‘grotesque,’ the ‘ornament’) after the image of the self (logos, figured through *ut pictura poesis*, genius, and *dessin idéal*).¹¹⁸ This classicizing gesture is the ultimate index of constructive universalism’s (willed) anachronism and its complex rerouting of ideological matrices.¹¹⁹

Torres-García’s attachment to the ideals of classicism makes his construction of the primitive highly complex, a complexity this study can only hint at. Suffice it to say that what must be considered to give a full account of Torres-García’s notion of the primitive is how he folds it back within classicism itself, thereby estranging the self-image of classicism from the inside out. In addition, his alignment of the European avant-garde movement of geometric abstraction with the classical tradition, while at the same time serving as the point of reference for the primordial Andean, tectonic paradigm as the progenitor of constructive universalism, makes his discourse take on a perplexing density, shot through with coloniality down to its very core. The density of this rerouting of primitivism through classicism, given that classicism constructed itself in dialectic opposition to its self-produced other, i.e., the primitive, makes Torres-García’s vocabulary border on self-parody, as each term already performs its own contradiction by implication. Caught within this loop, whenever Torres-García uses the words ‘purity,’

¹¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of the three central notions of classicism, “*ut pictura poesis*, artistic license, and *dessin idéal*” guiding the “Europeans’ interpretation of ‘primitive’ art” (32) as the dark double – the inverted image – of classical ideals encompassed through counter-concepts such as, just to name a few, the ‘grotesque,’ ‘arabesque,’ and ‘ornament,’ see Frances S. Connelly’s *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics, 1725-1907* (1995).

¹¹⁹ It is baffling that up to now no account of Torres-García’s work has ever been particularly perturbed by this paradoxical identification with the classical tradition, which was subsequently projected onto the Indo-American (and increasingly so after Torres-García’s return to Montevideo). The literature on Torres-García’s writing has never addressed the contradictory ‘routes to roots’ of constructive universalism – at most it has merely recounted them, unproblematically, apologetically – which, if the following caricature be allowed, can be summed up as the transposition of Athens and Jerusalem – via a detour through Paris and Cusco – onto Montevideo. Although I cannot deal with the full intricacies of this ideological voyage in this study, one must bear it in mind when reading Torres-García. That is to say, one should never take him at his word, but always at his artworks, since the latter dispel some of the utopian-ideological fantasies of the former. The critical force of his art vis-à-vis his writing is precisely the main concern of this study; his art is quite unforgiving in the face of some of the exorbitant claims of his discourse.

‘authenticity,’ or ‘origin,’ they simultaneously denote their antonyms as terms in a perpetual performative contradiction.¹²⁰

With respect to a theory of signification, constructive universalism evinces a similar identification with a particular tradition elevated to the status of a universal. In this case, one could trace it back to Western mysticism and hermeticism, and its master concept of *revelation*. In fact, Torres-García theorizes the elements of his particular *grafismo*-system as immediately expressive, non-representational. Torres-García desires his *grafismo* to be structured as a differential system. Ideally, this would be a language without writing, at least without writing in the linear, alphabetical sense. Not only should it be a kind of writing unconcerned with the transposition of sounds into written equivalents, it should also be a wholly dematerialized kind of signification whose discrete units have the power to directly ‘skip ahead’ to the ideas themselves. That is to say, following Torres-García’s neo-Platonic logic, to the thing in itself through a strange circuit of matter, the latter being ultimately disposable since, after its materiality is exhausted, one will no longer be in need of this ersatz. As such, it evinces the ideal of an immaterial, transparent communication without the ‘interference’ of a material medium. As Torres-García writes in *Universalismo Constructivo*,

the symbol, unlike all other images, *does not represent any other thing*; the symbol is different: it represents itself. Because in the symbol, idea and form are one and the same thing: it is the idea-matter, or matter-idea, whichever you prefer (1944, 98; emphasis in original).¹²¹

The non-representational core of the symbol-pictogram is formulated in terms of immediacy and expressivity, as opposed to material mediation and ‘merely’ visual

¹²⁰ Even more complexity enters the picture when keeping in mind that Torres-García positions constructive universalism in counterpoint to the Renaissance tradition, which he deems ‘decadent’ through its overvaluation of figuration – in a sense, by his own account, the Renaissance already marks the very beginning of the anti-classical (cf. below).

¹²¹ It has to be kept in mind that whenever Torres-García uses the word *symbol*, he intends what would now be called a *pictogram* or *ideogram*. Although he by no means implies a structuralist, linguistic theory, he does look for the universality of a shared, human visual language, a *langue* of the visual as a means for communication. In that sense, he shares the same image of structure proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic theory, in that the pictograms function much like the signifiers, whose meanings depend on their position within the ‘niche’ of the grid, the latter conceived as a surface of signifieds. However, unlike Saussure, Torres-García insists on the deep, diachronic essence of his pictograms, which are archetypes shared throughout history.

(aesthetic, formal) resemblance. There is a strange denial here of the viscosity of the pictogram, although it is counted amongst the genus of ‘image’ nonetheless. The symbol-pictogram is the non-sensory image, while the matter of representation - the image as sensory field - is devalued. Constructive universalism is thus in line with a Platonic tradition at pains to distance the ideational - the locus of truth - from the realm of the sensory, invested as it is in the dissociation of the sensory field from the logical field:

This is the strategy of the Platonic tradition, which distinguishes the *eidos* from the *eidolon* by conceiving of the former as a ‘suprasensible reality’ of ‘forms, types, or species,’ the latter as a sensible impression that provides a mere ‘likeness’ (*eikon*) or ‘semblance’ (*phantasma*) of the *eidos* (Mitchell 1986, 5).

Although it might be *idea-matter*, the symbol immediately overcomes its own sensory nature and leads the viewer into a repertoire of universal, transcendent, trans-historical, and, more importantly, univocal meanings. The pictogram is forced in the position of *eidos*, and carries with it an in principle intolerable sensibility; it is an *eikon* in spite of itself, and can only be properly ‘read’ as entertaining a relation of likeness on an exclusively logico-discursive level. On this reading of interpretation, visual associations are illegitimate, tied as they are to the particularity of the viewing body. In fact, interpretation - as an act requiring bodily energy - *ought not* to transpire when viewing these pictorial symbols, since it would only divert from their immediate transcendence. Because it operates on the expressive rather than the communicative, discursive level, *grafismo* is not intended for deciphering, for re-wording into a narrative that would make sense of the icon’s presence and resemblance - its associative connections - to what lies outside of itself. Deciphering would only detract from the power of epiphany enclosed within *grafismo*, since the pictogram “has a magical value, and operates directly on our spiritual sense *without requiring any interpretation or reading*” (Torres-García 1944, 99; my emphasis). Incidentally, it at this precise juncture that Torres-García locates a difference between decadent “literary symbolism,” which is trivial and descriptive – constituting the *sensus literalis*, the surface, the sensory, decadent level of the image – whereas “the real symbolism, as the ancients understood it,” (ibid.) is the direct presentation of a *sensus spiritualis*, a revelation not requiring interpretative labour. The pictogram-symbol is self-transcendent: it has always already transcended its own

materiality the moment it is glimpsed, it is merely a ‘provocative’ for intellectual intuition¹²² – Torres-García’s pictorial symbol is mystic, revelatory, conducive to epiphany.

Ultimately then, the pictographic, partaking as it does from a “set of structural characteristics,” a deep structure of signifieds, constitutes a repertoire of noumena forming a collective unconscious.¹²³ Meaning is what is *retrieved*, not produced; it is matter of anamnesis, in the strong Platonic sense;¹²⁴ it does not involve any construction at all, but is predicated on the passivity of a viewer who is merely made conscious of what was always already there but needed prompting through a disposable sensory image, i.e., the art work. By that token, pictograms require no interpretation since their meaning is framed as immediately understood - albeit subconsciously - as soon as they are viewed. Torres-García postulates the identity of the moment of perception and the moment of comprehension. The work of the artist-theoretician is to allow these hidden meanings to surface on the logical field, to make their meanings manifest through concepts that relay them in all their unequivocality and thereby ward off any possible ‘margin of error.’ With ‘margin of error’ I refer to the way that a consideration of the basic fact that the pictograms are (hand-)drawn, manufactured - that they comprise a materiality in excess to their identification as discrete ‘signs’ caught in a taxonomy - might disrupt the very notion of systematicity itself.

¹²² In Chapter 1 (section 1.1), I elucidate the notion of the Platonic ‘provocative’ in reference to W. J. T. Mitchell’s characterization in *Iconology* (1986).

¹²³ Mário H. Gradowczyk deems an interpretation that invokes Carl Jung’s theory of archetypes, in its postulating of a deep “connection between archaic and modern societies,” (2007, 222) as the mode of analysis that best approximates – in fact, mirrors – the theory of constructive universalism in its intention of “reaffirming the archetypal character of [Torres-García’s] world of structures and symbols” (ibid.; my translation). Gradowczyk’s understanding of grafismo is broached in section 2.3 of this chapter.

¹²⁴ Cheetham traces abstract art’s investment in the Neo-Platonic doctrine of anamnesis back to the Symbolist movement, Paul Gauguin’s Synthetism and Albert Aurier’s exegesis of Gauguin’s art through Plotinus. As he writes, “memory was *the* faculty, then, because it gave access to [the] world of essences while simultaneously unfettering the artist-seer. Memory guaranteed the ontological certainty that artists found wanting in contemporary positivism and what they saw as its parallel in art, academic painting. Writing explicitly about Gauguin and Synthetism, Aurier provided a poetic version of this discovery in the doctrine of anamnesis: ‘we remember unconsciously,’ he says, ‘the times when our souls relaxed in the marvelous garden of Eden of the pure ideas.’ The metaphysical notion of origin, source of all security, is here described in a neoplatonic/Christian manner” (Cheetham 1991, 23). Constructive universalism searches for ontological security in the purity of origin of Andean geometric art.

That Torres-García allows the pictograms a modicum of “multidimensionality, admitting other interpretations that are related to the cultural conditions and spiritual motivations of its recipients” (Gradowczyk 2007, 223; my translation) is irrelevant. Constructivism’s ‘multidimensionality’ is conditioned by the operations of the logical field: all associations must, in the final analysis, give testimony to the truth of ‘Abstract Man’ and the primordially of ‘structure’ and ‘universality.’ Particulars do not exist except as so many faces of the universal. Here, again, Torres-García’s archaism points to a truth his own conception of art cannot encompass. If art is merely a pedagogy of ideas, then how is it possible that the vehicle for its epiphany is returned to - in its full materiality - again and again? Does Torres-García’s archaism precisely not show that art - as ‘effect’ of the modern - is the space where the concept of truth as ideal correspondence is exposed as out of time? How is it possible that the handmade has become a site of ‘restorative nostalgia’ (cf. Boym 2002) and regressive fantasy?¹²⁵ Does his art not show that the distinction between the handmade and the mechanically, technologically mass-produced has instituted new regimes of intelligibility, regimes that his artworks in effect respond to? That materiality itself has become a locus of contention is what his art insists on, and which his writing - at least as far as its logical field is concerned - cannot handle.

The unidimensionality of constructive universalism not only makes it blind to technology and mediation, but to cultural differentials as well. The images of disparate cultures and times are perceived through an eye intent on tracing identities, of seeing the homeomorphic. Torres-García’s eye, to borrow Hubert Damisch’s turn of phrase - itself a paraphrase of Marx’s dictum that “the senses have become directly in their practice *theoreticians*” (Damisch 2011, 1; emphasis in original), is an eminently “theoretical eye” (ibid.), intent on recognizing the “spirit of synthesis” that gathers disparate art traditions under the concept of the Abstract-Universal, the centripetal force that attested to a unifying “abstract vision of reality.”

¹²⁵ On nostalgia as a modern diagnostic of alienation as well as a mood drawing out utopian possibilities, see Chapter 1 (section 1.3), where I rely on Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia* (2002). There, I also go into the notion of ‘aura’ (Benjamin 2003) and Torres-García’s attempt to restore it by distancing himself from mechanical reproducibility. For more on Torres-García’s distancing, see my discussion of manuscript in section 2.4 of the current chapter.

Rejecting the tradition of the renaissance, [Torres-García] felt that the drawings of the primitive civilizations, including African, pre-Columbian, Chaldean, and Egyptian, were superior examples of art which manifested the true spirit of synthesis based on an abstract vision of reality (Duncan 1974, 85-86).

This theoretical eye is ‘fluent’ - since it is a matter of visual literacy - in tracing the work of reason in material manifestations attesting to abstract, geometric thought, in discerning homologous structures. Identifying the material vestiges of the spirit of abstraction is a work of conceptual-intuitive divination, and the task of the artist of the present is to recreate this spirit, and reconnect with the abstract rule as

that which is used in order to realize the construction of a complete painting, of a sculpture, and to determine the proportions in architecture. And only that spirit makes it possible for a work to be seen in its totality, in one order, in unity. That rule, throughout the ages, what marvels it has achieved (Torres-García, qtd. in Duncan 1974, 86).

What is constructed is a very specific image of reading, interpretation and aesthetic experience. The work is not seen, it must be read, but read in a way that the very act, the labour of reading, is suspended through direct communicability on the conceptual, ideal level, without giving the ‘interference’ of the material - of the *poiesis*, the made, the drawn, and painted quality, any heed. Torres-García’s ideal viewer is one who can reduce the graphisms in the paintings to his tabulations, to his theoretical images (Figure 2.2 and 2.3). In other words, the interpreter is he/she who can reproduce abstraction, abstraction framed as process.¹²⁶ The viewer must in a way replicate the work of abstraction undertaken by the artist.

The ‘seeing’ of the abstract, tectonic infrastructure exemplified in other art is predicated on a visual literacy revolving around a criterion for recognition that Torres-García never fully explicates, as it is a matter of intellectual intuition, of the feeling of harmony that is occasioned by proportion, which is but the sensory prelude to deeper spiritual meaning. In fact, Torres-García must never make the criteria for discernment

¹²⁶ I will return to the aporia of the narrative construction of abstraction as process, must forcefully articulated by Van Doesburg and replicated by Torres-García - despite what the notion of ‘construction’ seems to promise as counter-discourse – in Chapter 4, section 4.3 where I focus on *Ästhetische Transfiguration eines Gegenstandes*.

fully manifest since geometry, at least within the doctrine of constructive universalism and the art that attests to the sacrality of geometry, is the vehicle for the dissemination of hidden teachings. Torres-García speaks of his art as if it were the expression of an introversion that should not have been put in writing, or even in painting, or made public at all. It is as if materiality were an embarrassment, as if the necessary materiality of art and writing, by the very resistance they offer to thought, stand in the way of the utopia - or should one say, the ideology? - of full, unmediated speech.¹²⁷ This knowledge is presented as so overwhelming that it can only be glimpsed and taken in ‘sideways,’ bit by bit, for fear of a blindness attendant on violent revelation, the prelude to conversion. In a time where the esoteric has become utterly anachronistic, in a time of mass communication where the very notion of hermeticism itself was becoming unintelligible, Torres-García takes a gamble and risks everything on an uncompromising archaism. His willed archaism constitutes the eye of the storm of avant-gardisms trying to outdo one another in their claiming of the ‘modern,’ thereby attesting to a displaced idea of temporality now reigned by the self-perpetuating tradition of the new. Torres-García desires time to slow down to the pace of timeless ritual at a time when the concept of time itself was changing even more radically through techno-reproducibility. Constructive universalism is the nostalgia for a lost image of time.¹²⁸

Torres-García’s art theoretical eye is thus also an esoteric eye. This has implications for the reception he projects onto his own works, and the normative ideal of

¹²⁷ For a discussion on the interrelation of utopia and ideology in relation to Oswald de Andrade’s “Anthropophagist Manifesto” (1928), see Chapter 7 (section 7.2.1). There, I rely on Paul Ricoeur’s (1988) dialectic of ideology and utopia.

¹²⁸ Gregg Lambert adduces Octavio Paz’s understanding of the “acceleration of history,” as the mutation of the image of time into “dizziness and vertigo,” as the effect of modernity’s (and post-modernity’s) break with the conception of history as a continuum and the deregulation of the strata of time in distinct time periods (cf. Lambert 2008, 49). Constructive universalism is the diagnosis and reaction against this accelerated time, and the work of art is posited as the still centre in this storm, a stillness that makes it appear anachronistic. What makes Torres-García’s project so singular is precisely this archaism that at the same time will endow it with a new avant-garde valuation in its exploration of the visuality of the written word. From index of atavistic anxiety it turns into a strange precursor for the typographic experimentation of Concrete Poetry of the late fifties and early sixties as well as the written paintings of León Ferrari and Cy Twombly (see. Section 2.4 of this chapter).

interpretance¹²⁹ he constructs through his writings, which his art works never fail to weigh down and thicken with materiality. The latter figure the *actuality* of visual resistance to his postulates of reception. Torres-García's discourse documents the artist's resistance - his inability - of letting go of his artwork, of allowing it to become public in a way his conceptual apparatus can never control. The interpretant he demands is in a way a mitigation, a policing of interpretation itself. Constructive universalism's logical field is intent on cordoning off its art works from the *labour* of interpretation, a labour that is figured as merely "common," that is to say, communicable, and "superficial," that is to say, starting from the work of art as aisthesis. This attitude to knowledge and its accessibility - Torres-García's gnosticism - is what distinguishes the esoteric, as Adolfo M. Maslach remarks in connection with Torres-García's conception of art:

‘Esoteric’ signifies not only a special category or form of knowledge but also a particular attitude about knowledge, for it supposes a distinction between common, superficial knowledge and an ‘interior,’ authentic knowledge centred in the nature of the ‘real’ (Maslach 1992, 149).

As Peter Sloterdijk reminds us in the opening paragraph of *Bubbles*, there is an intimate link between the esoteric and geometry, a relation that informs one possible meaning of ‘avant-garde’:

Tradition has it that Plato put an inscription at the entrance to his academy, reading: ‘Let no one enter who is not a geometrician.’ Were these arrogant words? A declaration of war on the vulgar mind? Undoubtedly; for it was not without reason that a new form of elitism was invented at the academy. For one amazing moment, the school and the avant-garde were

¹²⁹ To invoke the vocabulary of C.S. Peirce, Torres-García constructs an ideal, normative ‘final interpretant,’ in which he stipulates, in advance, the effect the sign is to have on the viewer of his paintings. As Peirce (1977, 110-111) notes, “my Final Interpretant is the effect the Sign would produce upon any mind upon which the circumstances should permit it to work out its full effect. The Final Interpretant is the one Interpretative result to which every Interpreter is destined to come if the Sign is sufficiently considered.” Torres-García posits *grafismo* as a system of signs in which the ‘final interpretant’ is fully and exhaustively realized, with all its potentiality (“the effect it *would* produce”) already actual in advance (as the effect it *does* produce): the ‘ought’ of the sign’s effect is postulated as the ‘is.’ The *effect of grafismos* as signs must correspond to the way in which its theory sets forth its *modus significandi*. Torres-García thus institutes a closed circuit between the sign’s projected meaning – as attested to by its stable position within a taxonomy (cf. Figure 2.2; 2.3) – and the effect of the sign. This signals an anxiety with misinterpretation, and reveals Torres-García’s conception of the author as absolute authority and sole archon of his own work. Constructive universalism is a dogmatic system in which the intent of the sign must be believed to be identical with the effect of the sign.

identical. Avant-gardism is the skill of forcing all members of a society to make a decision about a suggestion that has not come from them (Sloterdijk 2011, 9).

Torres-García, after his return to Montevideo in 1934, imports his paradoxical classicist avant-gardism - all the while having remained faithful to his academic training - to the South and reframes it. He makes it newly legible and visible through the Indo-American tectonic paradigm, itself an import product originating at the Trocadéro museum. What he ‘returns’ to the South is a still image of a mythical pre-Columbian America, an image Torres-García will project on the actual post-Columbian South (cf. below).¹³⁰ At the same time, his Neoclassicism, combined with an esoteric view on art, equally undergoes an Andean, Mesoamerican modification through the doctrine of constructive universalism. Incidentally, Estudio 1037, the name of the place where Torres-García met with likeminded artists, and which would serve as the informal ‘headquarters’ of the Association of Constructive Art from 1935 onwards, greeted visitors with a “sign at the entrance: Nongeometers Keep Out (a terse Spanish version of the sign over the entrance to Plato’s Academy in Athens)” (Buzio de Torres 1992, 10).

This tension between forcing an interruption in the social fabric, of installing a moment of unintelligibility as the catalyst for a broad social change and the desire for this break to have effects on the social sphere and thus to be understood and followed through, this conflict between the desire for introversion and the demand for communicability as the animating principle of the avant-garde, is also constitutive for Torres-García’s praxis. On the one hand, he desperately aspires to the status of South America’s ‘organic intellectual.’ Upon his return to Latin America he embarks on a frantic campaign of public ‘re-education,’ a pedagogical project determined to force his audience to unlearn the bad habits of ‘decadent’ figuration and adopt an art and

¹³⁰ As I have pointed out in Chapter 1 (section 1.3), a return is always a production, the material creation of difference. In Torres-García’s case, what he ‘returns’ – in the sense of giving back, but equally in the sense of offering something no one (i.e., the population of Montevideo) asked for – to his ancestral home is an image of a Pre-Columbian essence he had assembled through archival research and his own visual experimentation. He thus brings home a highly specific image of home and primordial origin, only to naturalize and monumentalize this construct as the ‘homecoming’ of Abstract Spirit. This plays on the tension between the “restorative” and “reflective nostalgia” (Boym), in that Torres-García sees his creative intervention (reflective nostalgia) in terms of an eternal truth (restorative nostalgia), a move prompted by the ‘rhetoric of purity’ (Cheetham 1991). For more on Boym’s distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, see Chapter 1 (1.3).

metaphysics - constructive universalism - supposedly more in tune with authentic, indigenous regimes of visibility/legibility.¹³¹ On the other hand, he cultivates the image of constructive universalism as a gnostic aesthetic-philosophical system, whose inherent esotericism contradicts his commitment to institute a new art of the South grounded in principles that should remain concealed, but which must be made public if his dream of a ritual, monumental cosmic Southern hemispheric art is to take root. Torres-García's gnosticism conflates art theory (as the teaching of formal aspects of art), art history (constructive universalism posits abstraction as the *arche* of all human creativity), symbology and theosophy, thereby imbuing art and aesthetics with messianic overtones, and casting decolonization in terms of salvation. As I will argue in the following chapter, universal constructivism's privileging of the tectonic, abstract Andean paradigm as the model for this decolonization as salvation, is suggestive of the colonial myth of the Incari, in which abstraction will function as the sign of the imminent return of the hegemony of the pre-Columbian in South America.

This, of course, proved an impossible - if not absurd - utopian dream. After recognizing that his dream of a Pan-American cosmic art did not "unify all the art of the Americas" (Torres-García qtd. in Fló 1992, 36), Torres-García admits that he "almost believed in a miracle" (ibid.). In his own words, this miracle was to be "the resurrection of the ancient universal spirit made modern" (Torres-García qtd. in Maslach 1992, 153), of the resurrection of the spirit of the Indo-American, of tectonic abstract spirit become material culture. The true miracle would have been the esoteric becoming exoteric, of the possibility that something wholly new would have become part of a collective unconscious, that the artifice, the poetics of constructive universalism - no matter how archaic it holds itself to be - would have become an archetype. What Torres-García's 'loss of faith' amounts to is the recognition of the artwork as aisthesis: the visual, the painting, the sculpture, the work is inherently demotic. As a sensory, sensual field, it already is *sensus communis* (Lyotard), an appeal to communicability demanding a viewer, a member of a heterogeneous socio-political community, to respond to its (non-discursive) claims in a free way, not beholden to the authority of the artist or any other

¹³¹ On the intensity of his pedagogical project, see Fletcher (1992, 118-119).

ontotheology.¹³² One need not read the work of art as an example of ‘Abstract Man’ for it to be meaningful. It is not a matter of submitting the act of viewing, the affective encounter, to some moral injunction – an instrumentalization of art as far interpretation is concerned – exhorting to its viewers to ‘read this work of art as if it contains all the signs bespeaking the return of the Inca.’

This then, is what I take to be the true meaning of ‘construction’ for ‘constructive universalism’: it fabricates an image of itself in the guise of an esoteric knowledge, a secret body of knowledge requiring initiation, but it is a secret without substance; it is the nostalgia for a substantiality that vanished with modernity. Constructive universalism is the staging of the arcane. It is the simulation in the writing of theory of a concealment that hides nothing deeper than its own surface, its own materiality. Art is the matter of aesthesis – this is the ‘mystery,’ the ‘deep’ truth the theory withholds from itself but which the artworks put on display. The disconnect between the writing and the theory attests to this: constructive universalism as discursive formation simulates a depth of spiritual meaning masked by the aesthesis of the work of art. The work is concerned with affect, while the text only knows how to speak of noumena, the idiom testifying to the aristocracy of the life of the mind. Constructive universalist aesthetics is the repudiation of its own aesthesis.

¹³² Jean-François Lyotard’s *sensus communis* – extrapolated from the utopian potentiality of Kant’s notion of aesthetic communicability – is a utopian possibility in which particularity and contingency – encapsulated in the sensory field of *sens* that “demands that the intellect be at a loss” – would find its place within thought (cf. Lyotard, “Sensus Communis,” in Benjamin 1992, 1-25; 1). Lyotard reads Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* as formulating a ‘subaltern’ image of thought, an image of thinking and aesthetics that counters the one formulated in the Critiques of Pure and Practical Reason, which foreground a conception of form and the sensory “finalized towards knowledge” (ibid., 3). The counter-image of the *sensus communis* in the Third Critique is one where form appears as “only an occasion for feeling,” where “the soul is seized by a small happiness, unlooked for, unprepared, slightly dynamizing. It is an animation of an *anima* there on the spot, which is not moving towards anything. It’s as if the mind were discovering that it can do something other than will and understand. Be happy without ever having asked for it or conceived it” (ibid., 5). For Lyotard, it is “this absolutely singular *sensus* which would be *communis*” (ibid.). In *Discourse, Figure* (2011), Lyotard develops a notion of sense where this image of thought is taken up as a means to explore the conceptual-sensory intertwinement of aesthetics – the cognitive dimension of aesthetics that Kant was at pains to disavow, and which Torres-García equally renounces. For more on the essential ambiguity of *sens*, see my remarks in section 2.3 on the notion of the ‘sensible.’

Incidentally, I believe this is also the source of much unintended comedy, unintentional since Torres-García's body of thought is always so deadly serious, as if laughter was too bodily and would only divert from the task of instituting a new aesthetic-philosophical tradition fit for the South. Torres-García's writing unfolds an ironic mutual distancing between the words that claim to speak on behalf of the works of art but never truly speaking *about* them, while on the other hand the art works - *qua* visual material given over to sight - distance themselves from the logical field of Torres-García's Neoplatonist discourse. One sometimes has the impression that Torres-García is not speaking about his actual work at all, but about works he wished he would have made instead, had the modern not intervened and created – in coproduction with the 'new' – regimes of legibility/visibility it would frame as outdated, as archaic. Torres-García speaks in the mode of classicism when face to face with works that have a decidedly modern 'look.'¹³³ A more nefarious consequence of this archaizing stance however is Torres-García's interdiction against politics and the aesthetics having relations, of their *mestizaje*. His apoliticism – his stoicism, his insufferable religious quietism - leads him to make pronouncements of the sort that the artist should “not care (relatively) whether one or another group is in power, or (relatively) whether one or another social trend should appear. Since there is no way of setting the world in order, it is all the same” (Torres-García, qtd. in Ramírez 1992, 66), or “although this land [Uruguay] was colonized by Europeans, that means nothing” (ibid., 79). Constructive Universalism is the staging of the clash between an archaic regime of legibility and a modern (already post-modern?) visibility.¹³⁴

¹³³ Incidentally, archaism and anachronism are techniques of the humorous, and Torres-García's discourse is no stranger to pedantry. It is of course also quite possible that Torres-García was just a bad theorist, but 'bad' in a tragicomic, foolish sort of way, stubbornly holding on to a discourse inadequate to the task of thematizing the futurity of his artwork through an adequate - fashionable, modern - conceptual regime. Torres-García: the Don Quichote of modernity who has yet to digest the news that chivalry is dead?

¹³⁴ To end this parenthesis with a quip, one could say that Torres-García observes the following de-politicizing categorical imperative while writing, only to negate it while producing artworks: 'write in such a way as if the French, Haitian and Industrial Revolutions (as synecdoches for modernity, coloniality and technology/capitalism) had never happened, and paint as if to negate this maxim, as if you do not believe a word of it.'

2.3 Graphism, or the Self-Interruption of Grafismo's Ideal of Transparency through the Matter of the Visual

Index, Indeterminacy, Desire: What does Structure Want?

As explicated in Torres-García's theory of the symbol, *grafismo*'s logical field is a mortification of the flesh in the sense that the pictograms – and the painting conceived as a totality – are emptied of their visual 'thickness' so as to 'animate' an ideal - anaemic - image of direct communion with the spiritual, the cosmic. In the end, Torres-García's theory is but the framing of his ideal – in this case, also idealized, disembodied, two-dimensional – reader/viewer, the construction of a monocultural legibility, of the inhabitant of the future utopia, the new hegemony, of Indo-America. Torres-García envisages his viewer as an acolyte having already undergone a conversion to constructive universalism; the viewer is the convert-construct already metamorphosed into the unquestioning pictogram adequate to the intentions Torres-García puts forward in his writing. The 'decoder,' or rather, the receiver of the work of art is the figure, a cipher of desire, of the desire of how to view constructive universalism's paintings, the way they ought to be made legible. His theory is therefore prescriptive, moralizing; it is the formulation of a visual literacy cordoning off a closed circuit of signification. However, despite its claim to self-sufficiency, the logical field of *grafismo* undergoes a centrifugal movement through its master signifier. The fundamental *sensus spiritualis*, the ultimate signified that anchors all pictograms within constructive universalism thereby rendering the work of art literally self-explanatory – not to say self-effacing – is the notion of ritual, of a structural 'rituality.' Rituality signals the inscription of the work of art – or rather, it indexes the desire for such a reinscription – within a cosmic order. Yet, the concept of 'rituality' thematizes a performative contradiction located paradoxically on the level of performance and embodiment. Through its implication of the body, 'rituality' is precisely the zone where ambiguity insinuates itself to break down the logical edifice of constructive universalism: it disorients the system.

Almost all readings of constructive universalism have glossed over this constitutive tension and present *grafismo*, and the practice of constructive universalism as

a whole, in terms of a continuum between theory and praxis, as if the former is the guarantee of the truth of the latter.¹³⁵ However, Juan Fló signals - inadvertently, since he does not follow through on his own intuition, indifferent to the disruptive potential of his own words - the enigma of the conjunction of desire and gesture, and brings us on the trail of the sensible-sensory (Lyotard's *le sensible*), of sense as embodied meaning, or more precisely, as the short-circuiting of signification through its carnal surfeit.¹³⁶

Ultimately, this short-circuit gives rise to what Lyotard calls the *figural* (cf. Lyotard 2011), as the space of the eye within discourse, within language. The figural

¹³⁵ In her essay on Torres-García's *maderas*, Ramírez keeps reiterating - as if driven by an obsessive compulsion to repeat - the 'enigmatic' nature of the works. Not only are they "enigmatic" (Ramírez 2009, 33), they are equally "puzzling and bewildering," and ultimately "unclassifiable" (ibid., 34). Although an intimate link between the 'enigmatic' and the materiality of the work is suggested, the enigma never travels further than the rhetorical level instead of prompting an affective encounter with the enigma in its visibility. That is to say, the work's 'enigmatic' nature is posited as transparent and functions as a topos rather than an invitation to look more closely rather than merely seeing through the works. To claim that a work is an enigma and offer no interpretative labour is to push the work back into transparency. Surely, the recognition of an enigma can never be this obvious?

¹³⁶ Jean-François Lyotard distinguishes 'signification' from 'sense,' the latter rendered as "meaning" in the English translation (Lyotard 2011) of *Discours, Figure* (1971). As the notion of 'meaning' does not capture the imbrication of the sensory in sense (but gives Lyotard's work the patina of phenomenology and hermeneutics, moving it further away from its renegotiations of Kantian aesthetics), it prompts the translator to clarify that "both *signification* and *sens* can translate as 'meaning.' Because Lyotard differentiates the former from designation as what is transparent linguistic comprehension from the gesture of reference, I translate signification as 'signification' and reserve 'meaning' (*sens*) for the 'thick,' 'opaque' sign" (Lyotard 2011, 400 n10). However, sense not only encompasses the 'opacity' and 'thickness' of the sensible, but also points to the cognitive/conceptual always-already at work in aesthesis as non-discursive cognition, making 'sense' comparable to Guattari's notion of 'a-signifying semiosis' (cf. above). By contrast, 'signification' signals the subsumption of the sensory manifold into a systematics - the "logical space" as Lyotard calls it with regard to his analysis of "Un Coup de Dés" (2011, 68ff) - of concepts and discourse. In the process of signification, the sensible - the particular, the contingent - in the form of 'sense' is sacrificed in the name of the generality and universality to which the system aspires, thus hollowing out the affective, indeterminate material substratum of conceptuality. In addition, the translator adds that the word *sensible* also poses the threat of ambiguity, with its possible reverberations as "'sensory,' 'physical,' 'tangible,' or 'material' as possible translations of *sensible*" (Lyotard 2011, 399 n5). The ambiguity is resolved since "I choose, for the sake of consistency and clarity, to translate it as 'sensory'" (ibid.). Clarity is not what the 'sensory' aims at: the sensory-sensible, in its intertwining with sense (in all the ambiguity of the latter's 'signification'), points to the complicity of the sensory and the conceptual, the constitutive interrelation of legibility and visibility, of sentience and sapience. The sensible is what interrupts the clear and distinct distribution of the architectonics of signification by insisting on the opacity of meaning as *sens*, the material resistance to signification. The sensible invokes the cognitive 'readiness' of the 'sensory,' which finds its 'place' in *sens* and the "sensory field" that is its 'playing ground,' a fundamental ambiguity that is missed when insisting on the 'sensory' as opposed to the cognitive. Incidentally, I will continue to use term 'logical field' in contrast to Lyotard's notion of the "sensory field" (2011). With the 'logical field,' I refer to the logical, propositional claims of discourse in its epistemological strivings.

gestures towards the constitutive otherness, the ‘thickness’ of a heterogeneity always-already moving within language and signification, de-structuring structure from the inside. The eye inhabits the spoken and written, an opaque viscosity that is non-territorializable by the word, although it resides within it just the same. On the other hand, the figural is what upsets the visual integrity of the perceptible, ‘thickening’ the eye with the weight of legibility, with figures of speech making the clarity of view always but a rhetoric of purity. The figural is the name for the legibility in visibility, for the visibility within the legible, making their distinction a theoretical fiction. The figural is *l’épaisseur*, “the thickness, or rather a difference, which is not to be read, but rather seen” (Lyotard 2011, 3) within discourse, but equally within the optical field. It is an inexhaustible depth of layering - “the thickness of the flesh” of the “sensory” (ibid., 4) - that resist the idea of structure - as symbolic closure, as the closure of the classical ‘symbol’ (cf. Benjamin 1977)¹³⁷ - from achieving unity and circularity. “The painting is not something to be read, as contemporary semiologists would have it. Rather, as Klee put it, it has to be grazed, it makes visible, giving itself up to the eye like the exemplary thing it is, like naturing nature (to borrow Klee's words again), since it makes visible seeing itself. What is more, it makes visible that seeing is a dance” (ibid., 9). Insofar as reading is a seeing, it is also a dance. The figural is the space where the dance of seeing and reading, the visible and the legible, acquires its unpredictable rhythm. Graphism, manuscript, hypericonicity: these are the three ways in which the materiality of visibility and legibility, the opacity of visual-verbal textures, enter the dance, and syncopate the monotonous, solemn procession of constructive universalism’s discourse of purity with its dichotomy between reading and viewing.

The sensory field of figurality opposes a *modus significandi* imagined as a structural effect of, in this case, the mere combinatory logic of pictograms and their integration within the totalizing ‘schema’ of the classificatory grid (Figure 2.3), subsequently posited as immediately expressive to the ‘spiritual faculty’ and ultimately transcendent, mystical. By offering a reading that thematizes the indexicality lodged at

¹³⁷ For more on Walter Benjamin’s critique of the fantasy of the symbol as self-sufficient unit of signification, whose meaning is assured through its position within a classical architectonic of meaning, see Chapter 1 (1.2 and further).

the heart of the operative level of the icon, Fló offers a glimpse of where a critique of coherence can start. The icon appears less and less an ‘icon,’ the latter understood as a sign in a structure of signification, with iconology as the analogon of semiotics remade in the aniconic image of structural linguistics.

The schematic signs are (...) signs that indicate an intentional link with the cosmos unrelated to the actual vision of nature or to languages that attempt to transcribe it. These signs have no individual significance in [Torres-García’s] painting – nor do they form a discourse, as ingenuous attempts to decode them have pretended; what they do, taken as a whole, is to point toward the entire cosmos. They simply state that this painting wants to create a link with the universe, and they state this in a purely visual way by interweaving and losing themselves within the structure as a whole (Fló 1992, 32).

A strange tension, a confusion rather, becomes apparent between the autonomy of the work – the integrity of the work as comprised of “purely visual” elements constituting a “structure as a whole” – and its desire for absolute heteronomy, encapsulated in the sentence “*this painting wants to create a link with the universe*” (my emphasis). There is friction between the actuality/particularity of the work, i.e., “*this painting*” – right here, now, its irreducible haecceity¹³⁸ – and the possibility – the ‘wanting’ – of the claim to universality posed by the sum of its ideograms. This *wanting* testifies to a utopian moment that, paradoxically, can only be deciphered by those initiated in constructive universalism, although, ideally, the essence of its secret is precisely that it ought not be the object of any deciphering. I read this as an admission that iconicity is wanting, that the icon is always already more and less than a stable, discrete icon. The indexicality of resemblance opens up vistas of visual association, a multitude of connections that intimates a non-discursive kind of knowledge, with the pictogram an accretion of tracings, past and future. The icon is thus also always a hyper-icon, a condensation of images, always beside itself, always multiple - in this sense the image does not “form a discourse,” an unambiguous text that merely awaits its proper ‘decoding,’ but a visual surface of overdetermination and crisscrossing of meanings. The image is more. On the other hand, the image is less: its aesthesis works on the senses and triggers

¹³⁸ For a discussion of haecceity and the two different regimes of irreducible particularity that *The Inverted Map* superimposes, i.e., cartography and cosmology, see my remarks in Chapter 1, section 1.2.

indeterminacy, of meaningfulness without determinate meaning, of its speaking from a locus of enunciation beyond the confines of clear and distinct intelligibility. No concept can fully come to terms with the work's uncertainty, its unknowability in epistemological terms. In this sense, the work of art is indeed impervious to any attempt that pretends to exhaust the opacity of what is offered to view - to "decode" the work is to turn a blind eye to the visual.

Although "not a discourse," Fló insists that the painting - as an assemblage of pictograms woven into the fabric of the overall composition - is nonetheless a statement, a kind of saying. Paradoxically, what it "states" is of the order of desire. The puzzling logic of the argument - not really an argument, but the apodictic assertion (as a stating of the stating of the obvious) - is that through its pictograms, the composition intimates that it 'wants' to transcend itself, to become part of the cosmos through merging with the structure as a whole. Although appearing to do justice to the irreducibility of the visual and letting go of the semiotic grasp, Fló nonetheless follows Torres-García's aniconism: the work's deepest desire is its self-effacement, its *Aufhebung*, its becoming life, its ceasing to be art. Incidentally, this *Aufhebung* is framed through the language of the tectonic, the Andean paradigm of weaving, in which symbols are 'threaded,' through warp and weft, into the fabric of the image, "by interweaving and losing themselves within the structure as a whole." The task of the painting become tapestry is to initiate the viewer into a ritual engagement with the world, as taught through its example, where the ideograms lose their identity within the totality of the configuration. Yet, by making desire enter the image, structural semiotics - as the analysis of the role of the part within the whole - is made legible as a flow of desire. Indeed, What Fló highlights is the 'pleasure of the text,' implicitly undermining Torres-García's rhetoric of purity: the ideograms are presented as 'losing themselves' in the *jouissance* of the structure, quite 'simply.'¹³⁹ There is a certain erotics of interpretation hinted at here, not only between

¹³⁹ By thematizing pleasure through prosopopoeia - in a sense personifying the pictograms of grafismo as though they were affective, sentient - Juan Fló unwittingly brings out pleasure's disruptive potential vis-à-vis the classical architectonics of constructive universalism's image of systematicity. The textual logic of Abstract Man is confronted with the 'illogic' of the pleasure of the text, of the pictogram's pleasure of being incorporated, of 'melting' into the grid-structure to facilitate cosmic signification. What Roland Barthes writes concerning the uncertain "position of pleasure in a theory of the text" equally holds for

structure and element, but also between viewer and work. It is up to the viewer to respond to this self-effacement, this union of the part with the whole. In a sense, the viewer is invited to become-ideogram and thus attune himself/herself in the proper manner so as to enter into a mystic union with the structure, to ask no questions, to ‘simply’ respond to the ecstasy of non-interpretation as the ancients would have wanted it, no doubt, and discard all “ingenuous attempts” at decoding. Only in this way will it be possible to return art to its “celebratory, ritual function,” “to restore art to its archaic condition” (Fló 1992, 31). One must take constructive universalism on faith.¹⁴⁰ In the end, the possibility of art as a space of ‘dissensus’¹⁴¹ is foreclosed; what is supposedly

Torres-García’s theory of grafismo, considered as a logical system trying to emulate the image of systematicity of structural linguistics. As Barthes observes, “the position of pleasure in a theory of the text is not certain. Simply, a day comes when we feel a certain need to *loosen* the theory a bit, to shift the discourse, the idelect which repeats itself, becomes consistent, and to give it the shock of a question. Pleasure is this question. As a trivial, unworthy name (who today would call himself a hedonist with a straight face?), it can embarrass the text’s return to morality, to truth: to the morality of truth: it is an oblique, a drag anchor, so to speak, without which the theory of the text would revert to a centered system, a philosophy of meaning” (Barthes 1975, 64-65; emphasis in original). Pleasure de-anchors, “loosens” grafismo from the grid, making the pictograms appear “uncertain” of themselves and their role in the theory of constructive universalism: they become graphisms, hypericons.

¹⁴⁰ Incidentally, “Foi” is the title of a text he published in 1930, “on the subject of *the artist believing in himself*” (Ramírez 2009, 35). Furthermore, faith and doctrine became of the utmost importance after Torres-García’s return to Montevideo in 1934. There, he assumed the stance of the messiah of avant-garde abstraction – legitimated through constructive universalism’s discourse of the return to the true roots of the South, i.e., Amerindian abstraction – in a context where abstraction was wholly unfamiliar and the visual arts were dominated by *indigenismo*, the painting of *couleur locale* and variations on the realist style of Mexican muralism. Jorge Castillo emphasizes constructive universalism’s cult-like self-image, with Torres-García, the self-styled cosmopolitan *letrado*, having returned, in a spirit of magnanimity, to his home country to preach the new gospels of abstraction to a suspicious, decadent audience, assuming “his stance as an apostle or missionary of the spirit that he brought to Uruguay. Torres-García saw his task as a mission. He came to teach modernism in art, to create a school, and to correct the errors of imitative artists. He preached, then, the need to live in a spiritual dimension: ‘He who lives in the spirit exists in the dimension of universality. There is a geometry that corresponds to this universality. And this is where order comes in’” (Castillo 1991, 186-187). Needless to say, the image of *El Viejo*, who, after years of Europeanization at the centre of the historical avant-garde, returns to the South in order to pass on the legacy of pre-Columbian art and ‘convert’ South America to Indo-American abstraction – a discovery he made in the colonial centre, in the museums and private collections of objects of anthropological interest in New York, Paris and Barcelona – can count as a condensation of coloniality. For more on the strange routes to/of roots, see the following chapter.

¹⁴¹ *Dissensus* is a central term in Jacques Rancière’s political theory and invokes the redistribution of the sensible that for Rancière constitutes the essence of the political. As defined in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, “dissensus is not a quarrel over personal interests or opinions. It is a political process that resists juridical litigation and creates a fissure in the sensible order by confronting the

gained is a glance onto a future community, a total structure with everything in its right place. The critical potential of pleasure is foreclosed; it is a pleasure *for the sake of* “a centered system”: the pleasure of ideology.¹⁴²

And yet: on a more basic level, the mere insinuation of painting as a gestural practice - of its meaning as a matter of a *pointing* outside of itself - chips away at the stringent aniconism of Torres-García’s theory of *grafismo*. Against signification, Juan Fló allows a glimpse of the tactile sensory field, the space of designation, the space of the gaze, of the eye and touch, of the image, of affect, that “deep exteriority located on the border of discourse that discourse misses in the very process of signifying it,” that deep exteriority the notion of ‘index’ gestures at (Lyotard 2011, 48). Constructive universalism desires *grafismo* to be a transparent system, with its signifiers (pictograms) standing in a clear, one-to-one relation to its signified (the noumenon it expresses). However, as Lyotard shows, the index is the space where the gesturality of language insinuates itself into its fabric, attesting to a visibility at the heart of the sayable. “It is as if language, with these ‘indicators,’ were riddled with holes through which the gaze can slip, through which the eye can see and anchor itself outside. ... This outside refers back to the original intimacy between the body and its space (as well as its time)” (ibid., 38). Although constructive universalism minimizes the opacity of the pictogram’s pointing, its mimetic minimalism does give itself over to the figurative, as giving form to a sense already interrupting the rhetoric of purity and its unidirectional economy between the image and its fixed, ideal signification. The pictograms do too much pointing: although they signify abstract a-historical essences (‘love,’ ‘intellect,’ ‘humanity,’ etc.), they carry with them

established framework of perception, thought, and action with the ‘inadmissible,’ i.e. a political subject” (Rancière 2004, 85).

¹⁴² For more on the intertwining of ideology and utopia, and the affective power of the rhetoric of ideology that mobilizes pleasure so as to “command belief” (Ricoeur 1988), see Chapter 7 (7.2.1). In this regard it is important to point out that pleasure does not only work ‘utopian’ in that it “loosens” (Barthes 1975, 64) the logical rigour of a system, as in Roland Barthes reading (cf. above). It equally ‘hardens’ the ideological structure by affording believers the pleasure of identification, the pleasure of belief in something that transcends their particularity (i.e., fascism as the aestheticization of politics as Benjamin has it).

colonial histories that made possible the operation of subsumption in the formation of an archetypal repertoire of deep structural meanings. As overlays of images that span continents and epochs, these ‘archetypes’ are complex ciphers compressing the bodies of history, of legibilities, of visibilities. The discourse of constructive universalism forgets the archeological operation and salvage it had to undertake, so as to make itself visible as ‘expressive’ of universal ideas. The discourse of *grafismo* – as well as the visual elements – is “riddled with holes” of foreign, distant, timeworn gazes.¹⁴³

Juan Fló only offers a glimpse of materiality, however. As soon as Fló sights the locus of instability in which the triad icon-index-symbol becomes equivocal, he retraces the disequilibrium by falling back on an envisaged univocality of the ensemble of pictograms as far as signification is concerned. In other words, as soon as the a-signifying, non-semiotic aspect lodged at the heart of the pictogram-icon (as discrete signifying elements in a system) becomes palpable and threatens to overflow Torres-García’s ‘iconology’ - with the logos of his discourse regimenting the signifieds into an unambiguous system of signs - Fló retreats and puts the icon under the tyrannical sign of the ‘cosmic.’ This withdrawal obscures the tension between the gestural - the pointing, that which eludes signification, and can never be ‘caught in the act’ - and that which it points to. This “reterritorialization”¹⁴⁴ onto the cosmic plane is a merely ‘cosmetic’

¹⁴³ In Chapter 3, which deals with hypericonicity, I will further elaborate on the constitution of the “sensory field” (Lyotard) of *graphism*, with the pictograms always-already ‘gesturing’ to other images – other cultural traditions, historical epochs, compressed through the ‘collage’ of coloniality – thereby producing resemblances. This ‘general economy’ of analogy institutes a deterritorialization of the concept of *grafismo* as classical, autarchic symbol.

¹⁴⁴ The concept of reterritorialization is inseparable from that of deterritorialization in the thought of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Deterritorialization is “a coming undone” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 322) of more or less fixed configurations (in literature, art, discourse, or psychic structures) through instances that “disarticulate” (ibid. 1986, 86) stable ‘territories’ of thought. Reterritorialization refers to the dynamic of re-structuration after the disarticulation brought about by deterritorialization. With respect to constructive universalism, it can be said that it ‘deterritorializes’ geometric abstraction through the ‘detour’ of the Andean tectonic paradigm: the rigour of abstraction, the rhetoric of purity, is disarticulated through its insertion within a ‘foreign’ context, making abstraction take on new, unexpected historical (colonial) resonances. On the other hand, the theory of constructive universalism reterritorializes this defamiliarization by projecting it back onto the ontotheological concept of ‘Abstract Man,’ a humanist doctrine that brings everything back to a single explanatory idea. Furthermore, this concept becomes central in the exposition of the cosmological import constructive universalism draws from its premises, erecting a system of thought in defense against the deterritorializing potential of aesthetics and the materiality of artistic practices. The concept of the ‘universal’ refers to the principle of reterritorialization,

solution however, since the rift between the ‘wanting’ and the actuality of the painting is maintained. Even though the cosmic is presented as a ‘solution’ to the indecipherability of the constructive work - with cosmos as ultimate, ontotheological cipher - the painting will always ‘want’ more through each ‘stating’ brought about by the look of the spectator.

The cosmetic solution, which is but an evasion of the question of materiality, advances a second, self-reflective moment that elevates the heterogeneous units into a constitutive visuality in which the constellation of pictograms comes together, one would almost say, *conspires*, “*to point toward* the entire cosmos.” It is this desire for encompassing the field of designation - and the concomitant keeping at bay of visuality in its resistance to conceptual accommodation (the swirl, the swoosh, or the harshness of a line cannot be encompassed by comprehension) - that informs Torres-García’s desire for totalization as formulated in his architectonic of graphism, the systematicity of which Fló upholds and animates by an ‘idea of reason’ of cosmic dimension. Torres-García’s graphism is re-articulated in terms of a cosmology, a cosmology whose meaning is its own desire to point toward a beyond, in the sense of an immaterial, transcendent truth in line with the rhetoric of purity. In short, the pictogram is caught in a tautological movement, moving within the closed circuit of the canvas and grid where meaning is prematurely claimed as its own, legible from the canvas, as already structurally accounted for in advance, even before any viewer can set eyes on the painting. At least, such is the fantasy, since the ‘pointing’ of the pictograms remains – their work is never done, always arising anew with every situation they are perceived, where the gaze gives them body again: there will always be more ‘wanting’ with each viewing, with each viewing session inaugurating the hoped-for immersion in the transcendent.¹⁴⁵ The index –

while construction refers to deterritorialization: constructive universalism is a name for this dynamic back-and-forth.

¹⁴⁵ Although Lyotard is here speaking of Hegel’s notion of the symbol, and how the latter is always brought back – in vain – into the fold of language and signification (i.e. dialectics), it equally applies to constructive universalism’s desire to exhaustively ‘speak’ the symbol – the repertoire of ideograms – in its attempt to

“*this* painting,” all it ever wants is “to *point* out” – constitutes the depth of field that the flat grid of two-dimensional *langue* – with its horizontal (metonymy, syntagmatic) and vertical axis (metaphor, paradigmatic) can never fill: “the systematic grid of orders and theories takes place in a two-dimensional space without thickness and, strictly speaking, without sight” (Lyotard 2011, 29). Theory, and *graphism* – insofar as it presents itself as system, as two-dimensional and grid-like, as tabulation – is no exception, and can merely gesture to its desire to encompass this moment of sight, the depth lodged in the corner of one’s eye. Whereas constructive universalism as art philosophy, as discourse, fails to address the singularity of the work, Fló is right to pose the question of the immanence of the picture plane, of the irreducibility of the pictogram to the structure of the whole, by suggesting the sensibility of ‘wanting.’ The transparency and self-evidence of the transcendence promised by the painting as made legible by constructive universalism, is here interrupted by the immanence of desire, of the rhetorical personification of pictograms ‘in want’ of their integration within the structure. The merit of Fló’s words lies in the fact that they leave open whether or not theory gets what it wants, whether it gets this sublative ‘synthesis’ that would quiet the image’s ‘desire’ (it does not – the structure will always keep the pictograms ‘wanting’; only *graphism* and hypericonicity can fully formulate the unfinished nature of constructive universalism).

As an aside, it should be noted that given the impossible utopian demands of Torres-García’s modernist doctrine of constructive universalism, it must fail, of necessity. To amend Fló, one could say that the *graphisms* indeed signal that they want to point to the transcendent – the ‘cosmos’ – but know that they will have always already failed, since the Indo-American world Torres-García wants to revive is irredeemably lost. Or rather, it is ‘irredeemably’ *produced*, compromised as it is by a coloniality of which his artwork is an effect. The artificiality of the origin is exactly what he disavows, to the

delineate and fix its working through an anchoring discourse, which amounts to a suppression – a ‘forgetting’ – of the sensory moment it owes its existence to: “The mystery is that the symbol remains to be ‘seen,’ that it remains steadfastly within the sensory, that there remains a world that is a store of ‘sights,’ or an interworld that is a store of ‘visions,’ and that every form of discourse exhausts itself before exhausting it” (Lyotard 2011, 7). In this respect, anamnesis is predicated on the forgetting of the sensory.

point of obsession, in his writings, but which his works cannot stop showing. Only at the end of his life will he make the sobering admission that he would never be truly ‘American,’ not an Andean craftsman living within a pre-Columbian understanding of being. Or, in his words, he had “almost believed in a miracle” (Torres-García qtd. in Fló 1992, 36) the miracle of the restitution of a pure, abstract geometric, tectonic Andean world - a miracle, that most monotheistic of wonders of religions of the book...¹⁴⁶

“To indicate is to extend the index finger toward a place. Along its vector, the silent gesture constitutes an originary spacing” (ibid. 35), but this spacing – this production of the sensory field, the depth of field of sight – does not belong to language, but to a sensory field always eluding conceptual anchorage. It is the moment of pointing, as well as the non-signifying visual rest impervious to the demands of the system – the handling, manipulation of lines of the icons as drawings – that the theory of *grafismo* cannot take hold of, and which Juan Fló can only obliquely envision.¹⁴⁷ I propose the locus of this rift - the spacing between the ideal and the matter of the painting - to be that of ‘treatment,’ of the ‘handling’ of the icon - i.e. its drawing - and the manipulation of the surface of the canvas, and any material Torres-García transformed into a medium. The merit of Fló’s ‘slip’ is that it thematizes the locus of this rift as the body, materiality, the work of the hand and the risk it entails.

Grafismo’s Linguistic Reduction

Tomàs Llorens (2002, 187) quotes a passage from Torres-Gracia’s *Historia de mi Vida* in which the painter, speaking about himself in the third person, recounts the epiphany of *grafismo* - of “symbolic forms” - as the device allowing him to synthesize nature, the figurative, with abstraction:

¹⁴⁶ I will treat this more extensively in the following section of this chapter.

¹⁴⁷ All discourse on Torres-García’s *grafismo* is locked in the mode of explication, of exegesis. In that respect, art historical discourse as well as theory function as extensions of the words of the painter, in that they further unfold the doctrine of constructive universalism. Juan Fló’s contributions are one of the few that attempt a critical reading, a reading against the grain.

But one day he thinks: to the abstract must correspond, as an idea of a thing, something abstract as well. What could this be? It must be, to be figured graphically, either the written name of the thing, or a schematic picture apparently the least real as possible: as a sign. And that's what he does. He puts, within the sections of the construction, like on a stone wall, and in each niche, the drawing. That's it! That must be it. Yes, that was it, but it was only the entryway upon a path, as we shall see later. By pure chance ... (or emerging from somewhere deeper within himself?), not by pure chance then, but unconsciously obeying an internal vision, he puts, say, in this first work and its respective niches, a House (the way children draw them), a boat, an anchor, land B, a Man, a Fish (Torres-García qtd. in Llorens 2002, 187; my translation).¹⁴⁸

This ekphrastic scene, here embedded in the genre of the memoir, is a rhetorical device: its effect is to confer retrospective legibility onto a moment of intense, incoherent, ecstatic visual affectation and experimentation. It even endows this moment with a mythic aura through the narrative structure, the topos of revelation and heroism, making aesthetic innovation itself intelligible as a secularized conversion, a conversion to that which one has already been converted to, when taking into account the locus of enunciation (the doctrine of constructive universalism that is). The ‘discovery’ of “graphic symbolism” in fact becomes a synecdoche for constructive universalism as such, as the name for Torres-García’s “idiosyncratic plastic language that summarizes his entire artistic thought” (Paternosto 1996, 215), a ‘single-minded’ artistic thought. Its contribution lay in the synthesis between abstraction and figuration that turned out to have been its telos all along, its ‘final for the sake of which’ so to speak. Against all odds, and putting all the clumsy attempts of those Europeans and their avant-garde to shame, constructive universalism actually triumphed: through the heroism of the pictogram and

¹⁴⁸ Paternosto (1996, 220) quotes the same passage as evidence of Torres-García’s discovery – again, following the structure of an epiphany-like, mystic instance of revelation – of the tectonic paradigm, which he would later develop through the invocation of Andean abstraction. Since Paternosto only included part of the excerpt, I am reproducing Llorens’s full quotation: “Mais un jour il pense: à l'abstrait doit correspondre, comme une idée de chose, quelque chose d'abstrait aussi. Que peut être cela? Ce devra être, pour pouvoir être figuré graphiquement, ou bien le nom écrit de la chose, ou une image schématique apparemment la moins réelle possible: tel un signe. Et c'est ce qu'il fait. Il met dans la construction en quartiers, à la façon d'un mur de pierres, et dans chaque compartiment, le dessin. C'est ça! Ça doit être ça. Oui, ce fut cela, mais ce n'était que l'entrée du chemin comme on le verra ensuite. Par pur hasard... (ou émergeant du plus profond de soi?), non par pur hasard alors, mais obéissant inconsciemment à une vision interne, il mit, disons, dans cette première oeuvre et dans ses niches respectives, une Maison (comme celles que dessinent les enfants), un Bateau, une Ancre, la terre B, un Homme, un Poisson ...” (Llorens 2002, 187).

the ‘niching’ of the grid, it finally reconciled abstraction and figuration. Needless to say, such narratives of revelation and aesthetic triumph have nothing ‘natural’ about them: the spectacle of revelation as transparent, spontaneous enlightenment is their stock-in-trade.¹⁴⁹ That this is only the “entryway upon a path” can only be discerned after the completion of the movement: necessity only shows itself in retrospection, after the erection of a program, a method, as the name ‘constructive universalism’ implies. The moment of non-cognition, of the labour of visual experimentation, is recast almost to the point of premeditation, making the singularity of the event appear as necessary. But the very fact of inevitability can only become visible from the perspective of the terminus of the path. Only after the contingency of experimentation has been congealed into a story – the story of a life no less – does it become paradigmatic, a source of emulation and iterability: the initial risk of the experiment is forgotten in favour of the rigour of a procedure. However, as will hopefully become clear in the course of this analysis, *grafismo* did not ‘solve’ anything. Instead, it must be regarded as a rearticulation of the constitutive tension between abstraction and figuration that haunts all of Torres-García’s writing, and this tension is but one way of making the art works legible. Retrospectively, the instant of revelation is recounted as the quieting of the polemos between abstraction and figuration, a reading that facilitates the reduction of drawing - of the gesture - into sign. Moreover, the pictogram becomes legible as the very sign, the emblem, of this pacifying synthesis. The investment in the notion of sign equally bespeaks a merely formal conception of art, as if what is at stake in art is the formulation of solutions to problems painting poses to itself from within the confines of a canvas. This is to disregard that painting - a medium with an eminently Western genealogy - is also a

¹⁴⁹ This structure is also operative in the genesis of *antropofagia*, i.e. in Tarsila do Amaral’s retrospective ekphrasis of her painting *Abaporu* as the moment of birth of the Brazilian avant-garde movement. Birth, of course, is here a matter of artful staging, of narrative construction, just as much as it is in Torres-García’s memoir of the artist as a somewhat older man in *Historia de mi Vida*. In the case of *antropofagia* as well as constructive universalism, ekphrasis has become a topos, a recurring rhetorical figure – a structure reiterated over and over – that serves to gloss over the artifice of ‘discovery.’ The intimate link with the mythical Discovery of the New World is of course not incidental, and will become evident in the course my analysis. Rather than a sudden flash of insight, the moment of discovery is the outcome of graphic experimentation and labour, which the rhetorical construct helps to disavow. Paradoxically, since it is a matter of rhetoric, of artifice, the topos cannot help but simultaneously expose the moment of creation as artificial through and through: the *modus operandi* of the work of art as artifice is redoubled, via ekphrasis, and becomes a kind of parody of the naturalness of artistic revelation itself.

working through of coloniality (as I will discuss in the section on *grafismo*'s hypericonicity).

Llorens presents his “semiotic interpretation” (ibid., 192) as the most adequate reading of Torres-García’s work in that it remains faithful to the master’s conception of the sign as archetype, as “mental image” (ibid.), harvested from a deep, psychic repertoire of universal pictograms. Torres-García does not paint particulars. Instead, he paints “the idea of the thing,” which explains why in his paintings we always see

complete and not fragmentary forms such as those in cubist paintings. That is, in their mental representation, objects always manifest themselves to us as complete since they present themselves to us as types. It is only in an empirical view that we can see them as both fragmentary and objects” (Llorens 2002, 192).¹⁵⁰

This indifference to haecceity¹⁵¹ - and the rather perplexing assertion that we can somehow ‘perceive’ types directly in Torres-García’s graphisms, as if he merely painted to refute empiricism (if anything, painting is the ‘science’ of the empirical in its most ‘base’ sense, surely)¹⁵² - is precisely what makes a semiotic reading of Cubism impossible according to Llorens. It is on this point that he faults Rosalind Krauss for failing to see that in the cubist still lifes of Braque and Picasso, the glass of absinthe, however geometrically circumscribed, however schematically invoked or abbreviated, always contains a trace, a tell-tale sign, of the objects invoked. The geometric shape points back to a particular bottle, on a particular table no matter how fragmented the invocation of this object. Semiotics does not deal with particulars, Llorens suggests, and neither should painting, is what the Uruguayan master would have added as a rejoinder, nodding in perfect agreement with his exegete. This, of course, is correct: semiotics does

¹⁵⁰ “[N]ous voyons dans les tableaux du peintre uruguayen des formes toujours complètes et non fragmentaires comme celles de la peinture cubiste. C’est que, dans leur représentation mentale, les objets se manifestent à nous toujours complets quand ils se présentent à nous comme des types. Ce n’est que dans une vision empirique que nous pouvons les voir à la fois fragmentairement et comme objets” (Llorens 2002, 192).

¹⁵¹ I pay closer attention to haecceity in my discussion of *The Inverted Map*, where I draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction between interassemblage and assemblage haecceities.

¹⁵² This prompts the question: ‘How can one be a painter and a Neo-Platonist in (post-)modern times?’ One answer that presents itself here is to be blind to what the work of art gives to view, and suspend the work of one’s eyes in favour of a strict regime of legibility, i.e., a “semiotic reading” in the manner of Llorens.

not concern itself with *thisness*, with the locus of production, at least not the more unforgiving types of semiotics Llorens seems to have in mind.¹⁵³ Yet, what is more problematic than Llorens's suggestion that cubism is merely a 'style' of naturalism rather than the institution of a break with correspondence theory, is the inversion between theory and art his interpretation hints at. On his reading – and this is the disaster any theoretical discourse on the image courts, and the present analysis is no exception as it appears to be of the order of inevitability when writing about viewing – painting becomes the illustration of (semiotic) theory, and serves to give a theoretical position (semiotics in this case) more force of argument, as if painting were a rhetorical device enhancing the believability of the truth of a fundamentally aniconic theory. One way of closing the rift between gesture and desire, between what the image 'wants' – cosmic closure – and its actuality, its unfinished 'wanting' – the stubborn insistence of its perpetual pointing – is by evacuating all risk and to put drawing under the sign of the sign, as shorthand for clear visibility and legibility.

¹⁵³ Although Llorens's text was published in 2002, one could have the mistaken impression that post-structuralism, deconstruction, visual studies, and other paradigms in opposition to strict Saussurean semiotics, not to mention a whole body of incisive self-reflections on the disciplinary biases of art historical discourse have yet to make their way into art history. This in fact is what most studies on the work of Torres-García share, and the lack of critical readings of his work is puzzling in and of itself. In this sense, the discourse on Torres-García is an adaptation to his written work: it seems that in order to speak of his art works one must adopt a somewhat archaic theoretical sensibility in emulation of, to put it mildly, Torres-García's ambivalence with the 'new.'

to broach the density, the viscosity of the icon one must switch registers from the logical field to the sensory field:

To speak of graphs, now, and no longer of signs, requires a change in register in order for us to get as close as possible to the work that leads from the *modus significandi* to the *modus operandi*, along the paths of abstraction: the work, graphic in its essence, through which one passes from the level of significance to that of operance, the accent bearing on the production of effects. The graph doesn't lead to any signified, (...) it is the vector of an operation (Damisch 2009, 148-149).

As is the case with the diagram in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (Figure 2.5) – and Gradowczyk's tabulation does resemble the linguist's diagram in its (merely ostensible, as it will turn out) austerity – it is the visual component itself that constitutes an intrusion through its very iconicity, in its irrepressible effect of bringing forth resemblances. The icon as graph, as an intrusion, is irreducible since to accomplish a real, absolute abstraction would amount to its substitution with letters and words – with linguistic signs – so as to make it a 'type' without graphic interference. The demand for absolute legibility would force the visual to slide into language, to become the "written word of the thing" as Torres-García suggests as one possibility for figuring abstraction graphically (Torres-García qtd. in Llorens 2002, 187). De Saussure (or his editors) put, "within the sections of the construction, like on a stone wall, and in each niche," (Torres-García qtd. in Llorens 2002, 187) signifier, signified, and mental image. The visual element, the tree, as an image for the imagining within the structure of *langue*, is the figure of a tree, a type of tree. In Saussure's case, the icon of the tree – made to function as "the example for illustrating his conception of the linguistic sign" (Damisch 2009, 138) – is what marks the point of breach. The model for the visual archetype of tree in Saussure's system – and thus the archetype for the imagistic in language as such – resembles the venerable oak, and not the pine tree, weeping willow, coconut tree, rubber tree or Pau-Brasil tree. The point of Damisch's consideration of the tree-archetype is to underscore Deleuze and Guattari's thesis in *A Thousand Plateaus* that dominant Western thought is irredeemably 'arborescent', that is to say, it tends to invoke transcendence as a means to excise 'base materiality' (the rhizomatic) from the task of thinking (thinking is thus a procedure of ephemeralization), and works along an operation of 'branching,' i.e. a

logic of binaries (cf. Damisch 2009, 138). However, what Damisch cannot see is that the oak tree, as emblem of the operations of Western hegemonic thought, is equally an expression of coloniality. It is an ideological image maintaining the purity of a genealogy purged from the non-European, the image of, quite literally, non-hybridized origin itself. The ‘exotic’ is countered with the archaic, the rustic, the pre-industrial, the emblem of a European Arcadia untouched by global capitalism and the influx of the ‘primitive,’ the ‘foreign,’ an influx – colonization, exploitation of resources – that was the material condition of possibility for Western hegemony. Semiotics takes on a rather sinister, uncanny aspect by its visual reliance on what seemed such a transparent icon but that turns out to be so overdetermined.

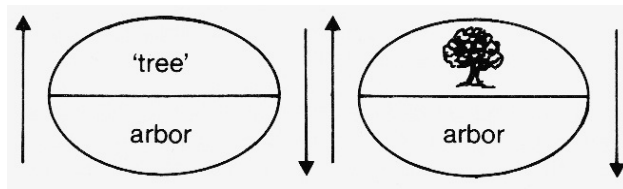


Figure 2.5 Ferdinand de Saussure. Diagram from *Course in General Linguistics*, 1916. [Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Duckworth, 1983), 67].

In summary, Saussure’s tree carries with it a constellation of resemblances and associations that renders it visible as a condensation of particularities. This counters its status as type, with resemblance – iconicity itself – marking the locus of the interruption of the architectonic. In its turn, the tree makes semiotics legible as a local formulation promoted to the status of a universal theory of signification, as an exhaustive model upon which all other practices of signification can be mapped as mere variations. The tree as hypericon, as graph, shows that linguistic theory is just as much a product of tracings and a complex history. To put things differently, the tree-icon is also an index pointing beyond itself to a version of history, which a supposedly universal, scientific theory of language helps to articulate.

Conversely, while discussing Matisse’s series of tree drawings, Damisch shows how the figurative, the ‘anecdotal’ in visual arts, itself operates on a principle of abstraction understood as schematization (cf. Damisch 2009, 143). This would also concern the most realist of realist representations, since, on a fundamental level, one

cannot reconstitute the world through a hyper-realist painting – or photograph – since its medium produces ‘cut-outs’ from the phenomenal destined for eyes only, as matter presented to the eye, which is not to say that it cannot provoke intense multi-sensory bodily affects, of course.

Gradowczyk’s transcription effects an additional irony. It must be stressed, however, that Gradowczyk’s table is no transcription at all, but a *stylization* of Torres-García’s drawing. Despite the stylization, the fish-icon – as well as all other pictograms for that matter – still presents us with traces of particularity that cannot be suppressed through abstraction as the process of the eradication of all idiosyncrasies. The pictograms still contain little ‘imperfections,’ crooked little lines, dots, asymmetries and small details in emulation of the master’s hand that cannot disappear. Furthermore, constructive universalism’s supposedly most neutral, indeterminate and archetypal of fishes does not seem to encompass the Japanese catfish, or any other more ‘exotic,’ ‘abnormal’ fish for that matter. Its zone of association is distinctly circumscribed, and is in fact a more or less direct visual quotation of the Early Christian Ichthys (cf. below). The irony is further compounded when taking into account that within Torres-García’s system of *grafismo*, the pictogram of the fish is the image for the ‘type’ standing for the natural world, the world of instinct, the world in its actuality, in all its heterogeneity. The world of appearances, of concrete reality for which the fish is the visual synecdoche, is a world imbued and pre-classified according to a particular history, a particular provenance. The graph for the natural world, the sphere of correspondences, is already the sedimentation of specific layers of pictorial and scriptural economies, while at the same time the graph, in its inexhaustible potential to point beyond itself through the anarchy of association, institutes a sensory field counterbalancing the centripetal pull of the logical field of the sign. The same holds for the sign-type of the heart, as symbol for the emotions. The triangle, the principle of reason and visual shorthand for the essence of Man and the primordial status of geometry, inaugurates a comparable zone of equivocality between the *modus operandi* and *modus significandi*. In fact, it is the *modus significandi* that is parasitic upon the ‘operancy’ of geometry. What constructive universalism unveils is that geometry is an art of drawing, of the creation of space and the gauging – not through mathematical formulas alone – of its operations through relations between lines, points,

circles and other forms, relations that depend upon the act of drawing as the practice of a body that can already tell up from down, left from right. As Henri Focillon (1989, 163) writes, “without hands there is no geometry, for we need straight lines and circles to speculate on the properties of extension.” From this perspective – that of the *modus operandi* – geometry is manipulation in its most literal sense, as the production of experimental, diagrammatic, non-discursive thought through construction (which is then gathered into a canon, like that of Euclid for example). To have an idea of a circle, one must first have drawn a circle, experimentally. Geometry is a practical science, a constructive art, and geometric abstraction lies somewhere between figuration and pure abstraction – in a sense, it is where all figuration must begin, and where abstraction must return to.

The circle, the square, or the triangle, the sphere, the cube, or the polygon, the cylinder or the cone, are things that call in one way or another for representation. Doubtless there are figures there, but figures that belong neither to figuration, nor to its presumed antithesis, non-figuration. We wouldn't know how to 'represent' a triangle, nor to imitate it, but only to trace it, to produce it (Damisch 2009, 144).

Gradowczyk's more austere tabulation and stylization of drawing counters the idiosyncratic risk of the hand and the eye coming to terms with the sensory given to view (the *modus operandi*) with a logical field of transcription as the dream of clear and distinct legibility. For the pictograms to become perfectly reiterable would require the transcription – and not the mere stylization – of the figural into the medium of “glottographic writing (spoken, sound-based signs)” with its “higher degree of discursiveness” and linearity (Jackson 2011, 232) – the transposition of the drawing to the glottograph ‘fish,’ in its moveable, transposable type for instance. Torres-García's theory, and Gradowczyk's image as the visual approximation for the logic of that discourse, is premised on a conception of aesthesis as a ‘looking through,’ as a kind of reading, a decoding of concepts according to a hierarchy and the disappearance of the body. Instead, as Brian Rotman argues, to truly look at an image, to do justice to the work of aesthesis, one must make room for the idea that

Visual images, with their need to be looked at (and not looked through as is the case for letters and symbols) and so cognized outside the routines and protocols of ‘reading,’ insist on the body, (...) de-occlude it (Rotman 2002, 100).

The lesson of Gradowczyk’s stylization, his failed attempt at transcription, is that the visual is an impediment to the ideal of transparency, that this de-occluding of the body is already ‘inscribed’ in drawing. To become perfectly legible the image would have to renounce its iconicity altogether – to become “letter and symbol” to be “looked through” – only then will it be sign. As if semiotics needed any more reminding, the icon will always exceed the strict economy of the sign. What both Torres-García’s as well as Gradowczyk’s version show is that even the most stylized of drawings invokes the aesthetic as the space where meaningfulness without determinate meaning occurs.

‘Style,’ ‘handling’ or the treatment of the image thus already contradicts the desired tautological self-maintenance of the system of graphisms enclosed within their grid cells. Torres-García did not copy-paste his pictograms and letters onto the canvas in accordance with templates. In each painting, the pictograms are re-created after the image of the system, but only by approximation. Or rather, since the ‘system’ (Figure 2.2 and 2.3) is itself *manographed*, it cannot serve as model of signification in its claims to necessity, to a law-like regularity.

Each individual pictogram therefore becomes its own model, with its specific lines, contours, hesitations, blots, scratches – the ‘subsemiotic’¹⁵⁴ which the stylization still evinces – attesting to the moment of risk inherent to drawing and writing by hand.

¹⁵⁴ On the “subsemiotic technical aspects of the works of art,” Mieke Bal makes the observation that “[a]lthough they all contribute to the construction of signs, stylistic variations, light and dark, composition, or more technical aspects like brushstrokes, paint thickness, and lines are not, a priori, signs in themselves; not any more than in a literary text sheer ink on the page, mere punctuation and syntactic structures are” (Bal 1991, 400-401 n16). If this discussion has shown anything, it is that the ‘subsemiotic’ does not contribute but short-circuits the dream of integrity informing the linguistically inspired notion of ‘sign.’ Sheer ink on paper, punctuation (prosody), structure as well as the “more technical aspects” of painting are the material conditions for poetry, prose, painting – the work of art as such – in the first place. Indeed, to make the work of art perfectly legible as semiotic entity – to read it only under its aspect of *modus significandi* – would require a transcription that gives up on the work of art in favour of a becoming aniconic. Meaning then becomes a matter of correct tabulation along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes, along the impervious model of the linguistic grid, no matter how much ‘sliding’ there is, since this ‘sliding’ does not have any effect on the architectonic of the grid as model for signification itself.

Risk itself becomes the model; drawing is the provocation of the accidental, and theories of signification only enter belatedly, after all the risks have already been taken. Drawing is the following through of the rigour of chance, of the provocation of the accident, constituting a 'loop' between the hand, the eye and thought, in a precarious constellation of the body and its exteriority.

Drawing out the Risk of Constructive Universalism's Materiality

In the words of Henri Focillon, drawing is improvisation out of the "resources of pure chance" (1989, 175). In drawing and painting, or any bodily 'play' for that matter, the hand always "tries its chance" (Focillon 1989, 180), but this chance always comes with a certain 'predisposition,' a specific kind of preparation, since in its work, the hand "piles up centuries in the passing of an instant" (ibid., 181). As bodily disposition, as *habitus*,¹⁵⁵ the work of the hand, eye and thought in the arts is circumscribed by local histories, regimes of visibility and legibility, the discipline of lessons learnt and unlearnt, traditions to follow and overturn: risk means nothing out of a vacuum, there must be the possibility of failure.

It is the possibility of failure that Gradowczyk's transcription, as well as Torres-García's theory of constructive universalism (not to mention the scholarly reception of his work), deny. In Torres-García's hand, theory becomes risk-management, and since

¹⁵⁵ The body, as the space of the *habitus*, can be perceived as the site where legibility and visibility come together, with the eye and hand of drawing and writing informed by societal inscriptions via practices. *Habitus* is the pre-discursive, bodily encoding of visibility and legibility, which makes manifest, in ephemeral ways through our everyday practices and 'unthinking' behaviour, our understanding of being, our ideological 'predispositions,' which are bodily dispositions. Our body is therefore never a 'pure,' 'brute,' 'naked' or 'primitive' given. It always comes with meaning, with an eye intent on drawing out and reading forms into the world (and enact them). As Pierre Bourdieu writes in *The Logic of Practice*: "Adapting a phrase of Proust's, one might say that arms and legs are full of numb imperatives. One could endlessly enumerate the values given body, made body, by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy which can instil a whole cosmology, through injunctions as insignificant as 'sit up straight' or 'don't hold your knife in your left hand,' and inscribe the most fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of a culture in seemingly innocuous details of bearing or physical and verbal manners, so putting them beyond the reach of consciousness and explicit statement. ... The cunning of pedagogic reason lies precisely in the fact that it manages to extort what is essential while seeming to demand the insignificant, such as the respect for forms and forms of respect which are the most visible and most 'natural' manifestation of respect for the established order, or the concessions of politeness, which always contain political concessions" (Bourdieu 1990, 69).

every drawing and painting is the provocation of risk, a text is composed in the aftermath of the work of art so as to quiet the aleatory, the accidental, thereby granting the unintelligible moment of chance retrospective necessity and univocal legibility. This, to my mind, is what informs the majority of critical reception of Torres-García's work: rather than provoke risk to the eyes, the critic is content with expanding upon constructive universalist theory. It gives no credence to Torres-García's sometimes very messy compositions, the 'accidental' deconstructions of his own theories through the praxis of painting, to the irreducible *mestizaje* that this text set out to interrogate. We have not even begun to look at Torres-García's art work: we have only read them through his writing, through the logical field of his writing, that is.

This forgetting of the hand in the body of work of constructive universalism and most of the texts that deal with Torres-García's legacy follows a structural pattern, a certain narrative regularity. What holds for the interpretation of *grafismo* has been extended to the consideration of his plastic works in their totality: they are read as if they were the signs within Torres-García's theory, as if they were mere 'illustrations' of the logic of his arguments, mere rhetorical figures. The trait that the theory of constructive universalism has in common with the majority of its critical reception is that it operates in the mode of explication, rather than engage with the effects that might upset the structural integrity of the mode of explication itself. This mode is intent on demonstrating how the artwork, in its discursive unfolding (*explicare*), can be folded back into the logic of Torres-García's argument. Basically, Torres-García's theory of painting, which is also a metaphysics, posits that if there is any relation to nature, in other words, if there is any trace of the iconic in *grafismo* or his paintings at large (through the usage of traditional Renaissance techniques in supposedly non-figurative works for instance),¹⁵⁶ this trace is merely incidental. This 'accident' of indexicality is in itself meaningless, and can always be brought back into the structural fold, within the overall composition of the plastic surface, thus engendering a closed circuit, excluding what is 'extraneous' to the integrity of the structural whole, to the spatial order on the canvas (the painterly microcosm) that

¹⁵⁶ For Torres-García's usage of traditional painterly techniques in his abstract compositions, see the Conclusion.

simultaneously resounds with a greater cosmic order (the transcendent macrocosm). The icon can always be reduced to a schema or 'symbol' within the overall configuration, and the overall configuration (the painting) is itself the symbol of the structural:

This combination [of line and colour] is capable of creating an architectural whole (a structure) that is independent of nature which may or may also not contain forms drawn from life; in the latter case however it will do so schematically or symbolically (Torres-García, qtd. in Casillo 1991, 175).

Line and colour are rendered in the service of schematization and or symbolization; they must submit to the notion of the icon, conceived as a sign, and surrender their graphic rest. Meanwhile, painting's materiality is suppressed in its elevation to the status of a structure, a sign, and not a graph; the image is presented as *eidos*, not as *eikon*.

The contours, tracings and rhythms of lines, the colors and their modulations, the thickness of paint, all these elements become invisible through a regime of legibility framing them as mere 'accidents' in the formulation of an all-encompassing 'universal.' There is no space for the 'idiolects' of lines and colours. The virtue of Gradowczyk's stylized reductions is that it highlights the strategy of Torres-García's theory and all the readings of its work in its wake in their preoccupation with the logical field of discourse to the detriment of the thick, sensory field of the painting, of the space of the body. To the possible primordially of the concept of Abstract Man or the tectonic paradigm, stands the actual primordially of matter, of the material condition of the possibility of painting, the 'alchemy,' the transmutation between the matter of the body with that of paint through gesture, and the body of the viewer inserting himself/herself in the sensory field. In the words of James Elkins,

Paint records the most delicate gesture and the most tense. Paint is a cast made of the painter's movements, a portrait of the painter's body and thoughts. Painting is an unspoken and largely unrecognized dialogue, where paint speaks silently in masses and colors and the artist responds in moods. All those meanings are intact in the paintings that hang in museums: they preserve the memory of the tired bodies that made them, the quick jabs, the exhausted truces, the careful nourishing gestures. Painters can sense those motions in the paint even before they notice what the paintings are about. Paint is water and stone, and it is also liquid thought. That is an essential fact that art history misses (Elkins 1999, 5).

Furthermore, Gradowczyk's transcription of the drawing, its further schematization and mechanization according to an ideal of impersonality and transparency, is a caricature of drawing itself. Torres-García's archaism undergoes a parodic inversion through the reduction of the drawing to the point of ideal, mechanical reproducibility, while his handwriting undergoes the same fate through moveable type (Figure 2.6 and 2.7). Gradowczyk provides us with a cosmetic correction trying to rectify the imperfections of Torres-García's drawing and handwriting. The parodic effect is compounded in that, through the asymptotic schematization via printing technology, its intent is to confer upon Torres-García's drawing an even greater aura of archaism by providing it with an archaeological transcription, as if we were dealing with an ancient script of some distant culture in need of deciphering and not with an invention of modernist art.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ In "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," Walter Benjamin associates the loss of aura of the work of art with its increased availability – especially through photography – with the demise of authenticity, of *Eigentlichkeit* (Benjamin 2003, 251-283). He makes the strong claim that "*the whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological – and, of course, not only technological – reproducibility*. But whereas the authentic work retains its full authority in the face of a reproduction made by hand, which it generally brands a forgery, this is not the case with technological reproducibility" (Benjamin 2003, 253-54; emphasis in original). Gradowczyk's reproduction serves to enhance the 'authenticity' of Torres-García's drawing by mechanically approximating the work of the hand. By that token, it simultaneously shows that authenticity is but a construction – it must be reproduced – that only works by virtue of imitation: rather than destroy aura, reproducibility augments the mystique of the 'original.' It is precisely the fantasy of some kind of primordial *Eigentlichkeit* that antropofagia will relentlessly mock through one of its central mantras: "I am only interested in what is not mine," writes Oswald de Andrade in the "Anthropophagite Manifesto" ([1928] 1991, 38; translation modified). In its foregrounding of the artificiality of the notion of art's authenticity in terms of a mythological rustic, non-technological artisanship, antropofagia seems to echo Theodor Adorno's main critique of Benjamin's atavistic conception of aura. As he writes to Benjamin: "You underestimate the technicality of autonomous art and overestimate that of dependent art; this, in plain terms, would be my main objection" (Adorno in Bloch 1977, 124). For Adorno's complete critique of Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," see his letters to Benjamin as collected in *Aesthetic and Politics* (in Bloch 1977, 110-133; especially 120-126). Although Focillon's highlighting of the hand shares in this fetishistic identification, my concern is not with the anti-technological aura it carries, but with how signification – as a dematerialized space, as the 'logical field' – is undercut by the gesture of which the hand is the metonymy. The 'space of risk' is shorthand for the opacity and unpredictability of the process of thought in conjunction – or disjunction – with the material, be it in the form of the drawing table, hand, paper, computer screen, keyboard or pen: thought must contend with the possibilities and constraints of materiality, which gives the work of art its specific 'forminess.' The point is rather that gesturality brings out the viscosity – the 'sensory field' (Lyotard) – of the written (printed, pixelated) word.

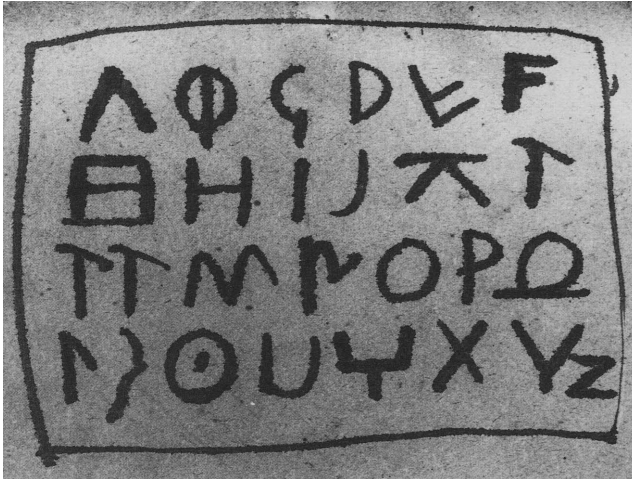


Figure 2.6 Joaquín Torres-García, *Alphabet*, 1938. Ink on paper, 12.4 x 15 cm. Private collection, new York. [Mari Carmen Ramírez, ed., *El Taller Torres-García: The School of the South and Its Legacy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 20].

Figura 7.14
Tabla de conversión entre el alfabeto latino y el diseñado por Torres-García.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	LL
Λ	Φ	ς	υ	ε	F	Θ	H	I	J	κ	ι	Τ
	B							↓		K		
								↑				
M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	X	Y	Z
μ	ν	ο	ρ	ϖ	ι	ς	τ	υ	φ	χ	ψ	ζ
						3		υ				
								υ				

Figure 2.7 “Table of conversion” between the Latin alphabet and the drawn alphabet by Torres-García (cf. Figure 2.6). [Gradowczyk , 275 (see Figure 2.4)].

The technological apparatus of printing and desktop publishing is deployed so as to provide the post-modern reader with the necessary material substratum in order to decode the simulacrum of archaism as presented in Torres-García’s original, ‘clumsy’ and too idiosyncratic drawing. The irony of the operation resides in the fact that technology is adduced in order to enhance the impression of authenticity and antiquity through the artifice of the archaeological transposition, while at the same time effacing all trace of originality by presenting Torres-García’s ‘discovery’ as a reproducible model, and not as a diagrammatical working through, a visual experimentation, a means of non-

discursive cognition in the articulation of a question pertaining to aisthesis. Instead of archaism, this diagram presents us with rigid tabulation, as if this were indeed constructive universalism's final solution, as if the neat architectonic of the table was what it had intended all along, but had failed to articulate clearly and transparently. Gradowczyk's streamlined architectonic is the most eloquent expression imaginable for Torres-García's desire for clear and transparent visibility along reproducible visual archetypes, although the price to be paid would have been the renunciation of the archaic.¹⁵⁸ An analogous transposition of the archaic into the modern via the conceit of the archaeological transcription is Gradowczyk's "table of conversion" (Figure 2.7) of Torres-García's manographed alphabet (Figure 2.6), whose letters the artist used in a number of his paintings (Figure 2.1 and 2.X). The conversion gives Torres-García's alphabet a patina of naturalness as well as obscurity – not to mention nostalgia attendant upon the discovery of forgotten codes – as if this were the script of a long-lost civilization science has now, finally, been able to decipher, while in fact it is an amalgamation, a hybrid, "an invented alphabet" that "fuses Etruscan, Greek and Semitic signs" (Sarabia 2010, 309). It is counterfeit, a staging of a lost origin through the simulation of a *mestizaje* of heterogeneous traditions.

In *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, Richard Huelsenbeck presents Torres-García's paintings as deposits of an ancient communicability whose code we have now irredeemably lost. They are alien signs speaking of a lost understanding of being – tablets of communication descended from the realm of the gods – which modernity can now only mourn through art, through the artifice of the staging of loss, and the pleasure of the hope that perhaps one day the tablets will be deciphered, a deciphering that would reconstitute a de-alienated ancient world. Deciphering is presented as utopian: once decoded at an unknowable future moment, the paintings of Torres-García will have become transparently legible, having reconnected its viewers with the lucidity of a collective unconscious no longer in need of decoding. It will have become simply lived, non-discursive experience, the practice of the everyday, habitus.

¹⁵⁸ If he had renounced archaism, Torres-García might well have inaugurated pop art, and become the forefather of Andy Warhol and Keith Haring.

Torres-García's paintings, like the ancient tablets of communication, contain symbols, fishes, moons and suns, limbs, and primitive instruments, as well as forms that we no longer understand and that arise from the depths of the collective unconscious - arranged in tiny boxes. These boxes are comparable to paragraphs in a letter; they are to be read in succession. And thus these paintings involve a time sequence; they draw us into the chronology of a specific experience (Huelsenbeck 1991, 129).

Rather than a locus of interminable mourning however, unknowability can figure as productive constraint, as a way to get on with our lives, as a celebratory *modus vivendi* not predicated on a modern 'habitus of a lost code' that elevates lack to the paradoxical, intolerable status of an ontotheological principle of (modern) life. It would require reorientation, and a different comportment to the status of Torres-García's art and his *grafismo*, as a privileged site where (il)legibility, regimes of visibly, scriptural and pictorial economies meet. Rather than awaiting the day of mythic deciphering, his art produces an attitude in which the shards of the past are co-created to form a present and a future, and become legible in this light. Constructive universalism is radically constructivist in this sense: at bottom, its praxis shows how salvaging is an act of creation, the production of a site that makes the past legible and visible in a specific way, and how the question of 'authenticity' is always a matter of artifice, of art, and need not be relegated to a narcissistic longing for one's own lost, integral self – of a pre-modern, 'authentic,' 'primitive,' 'Abstract Man.' This would amount to taking construction – the universe of constructive universalism as a poetic, manufactured universe – seriously for the first time.



Figure 2.8 Inca tunic with *tocapu* designs, cotton and wool. 91 x 76.5 cm. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, Washington, D.C. [<http://incadigitalmuseum.wikispaces.com/file/view/empi-incacloth-l.jpg/107696113/404x307/empi-incacloth-l.jpg>].

Tocapu, Graphism, Glottography and the ‘Language of Sight’

In an essay on the Andean *tocapu* – the recurrent geometric patterns found on pre-contact Inca textiles, vessels and pre-Inca murals as well as colonial Peruvian artefacts (Figure 2.8) – Thomas Cummins (2011, 277-317) warns against the residues of romanticism in archaeological and anthropological discourse that inform a desire for glottographic decipherability. This desire is nothing but the nostalgic projection of a lost code onto alien geometric designs, a projection that commands the visual to ‘speak’ forth

unambiguously so that the discourse of science can restore the artefacts to their full meaningfulness. It forces a plane of equivalence between the pictorial and the alphabetical, as if this were an act of justice, of restitution. Cummins points out that almost all recent work on the subject of the *tocapu* has been motivated by the discernment of a lack that would be overcome if scientific epistemology were to succeed in making the *tocapu* visible through a legibility that would compensate for the absence of a system of glottographic writing in pre-Columbian Inca society. In a sense then, the whole structure of colonization is repeated in that a scriptural economy is invoked as guarantor of truth; the medium of the book is equated with the ultimate criterion of intelligibility. In this fantasy structure, scientific discourse would retrospectively bestow, yet again, the great gift of Western writing upon the Inca, in a kind of perverse *Wiedergutmachung*: the moment the *tocapu* is transcribed is imagined as the instant of the extirpation of (symbolic) colonial violence. However, the happy tiding of decipherability, of the evacuation of the ‘secret’ that Inca *tocapus* are imagined to hold is also to exalt the consummation of symbolic violence. Finally, the process of colonization and civilization of the ‘illiterate’ Inca will have paid off in a future of perfect legibility, in the clarity of black on white, the transcription of color and forms into perfect readability.

Such archaeological deciphering is never an innocent act of translation: glottography is framed as the locus of truth, as the space where authentic, primordial Inca cosmology and signification can be unravelled. This demand for legibility onto the *tocapu* is an imposition, and is symptomatic of a will to reduce the troubling – since illegible, thus alphabetically speaking ‘nonsensical’ – aesthesis of visuality. It is the theoretical eye that reads iterability – the repeated geometric patterns, of colours, shapes, motifs – as immediately meaningful and ripe for the transcription into the regime of the glottographic. One magical item would solve the riddle of the Inca: an Andean Rosetta stone would exorcize all troubling visuality and make possible the dream of an exhaustive translation of the image into an aniconic structure of signification. However, semiotics, in this case an act of decoding, can never amount to restitution of lost meanings. The image of an unspoilt, pre-contact Inca phenomenology is precisely the effect of this will to decoding. Archaeology, the finding of the *arche* of logos through digging through layers of history in the hopes of finding an uncontaminated, unmediated

origin produces the idea of origin as the source of authenticity, an authenticity it can never retrieve since it is caught in a tautological circuit of self-fashioning. Current discourse in archaeology, anthropology and material culture are loci of the desire for the systematicity of writing in the face of the opacity of the image. Furthermore, colonial sources never described the *tocapu* as a form of writing. Cummins insists on

the unanimity of the chroniclers (both Spanish and Andean) who unequivocally state that there was no writing, as defined by sixteenth-century European standards, in Tawantinsuyu and that the *kipu* was the nearest equivalent. The *tocapu* is never described as something equivalent to writing, although many recent publications in Europe and Latin America insist that the *tocapu* represents a lost writing system that simply awaits interpretation, similar to and in relation to the *kipu* (Cummins 2011, 282-283).

Cummins's recognition of the caesura of unknowability echoes André Leroi-Gourhan's joyful affirmation of the unknowability of the original meaning of what he calls *graphism*, as referring to the form of humanity's earliest graphic expression grounded in rhythmicity and gesture (cf. Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 192) and whose earliest manifestations were abstract rather than mimetic (cf. *ibid.* xxi; 188-190). I call it joyful rather than mournful in that the actuality of the unknowable, of the opacity of the visual material that presents itself to the modern eye, works as a productive constraint allowing for more experimental, speculative,¹⁵⁹ visual approaches that do not bring everything under the conceptual regime of glottography and instead take the movement of the hand, the moment of risk, as its point of departure. That the phenomenology of *graphism*, i.e., the lived environment in which it was embedded and through which it performed its original meaning, is no longer accessible, is what prompts Leroi-Gourhan's experimental epistemology of risk, of drawing the gestural within the province of a theory of signification, a theory largely written in the subjunctive mood. As Randall White observes in his introduction to *Gesture and Speech*, the unknowability of the phenomenology of *graphism* did not prevent Leroi-Gourhan from formulating hypotheses. Quite the contrary, "for him this ideology (or meaning) was probably

¹⁵⁹ One of Leroi-Gourhan's main tenets, that *graphism* was primordially abstract and rhythmic, has been questioned by subsequent archaeological research (cf. Leroi-Gourhan 1993, xxi). However correct, this objection serves to highlight the experimental nature of Leroi-Gourhan's theory, which takes seriously the opacity of visual expression and the risks of the hand attendant on drawing, writing, and the arts.

unknowable and was specific to time period and place. This critical distinction between knowable formal patterning and unknowable meaning of constituent symbols” (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, xvi) was conducive to the theory of graphic signification itself, and the construction of an epistemology as an imaginative recreation of ancient visual practices from the vantage point of today under the name of ‘graphism.’

From this perspective, ‘correctness’ is not equated with some originary, ‘authentic’ intention to which analysis must conform. Instead, an interpretation is offered that sees itself as actively contributing to the construction of the past, as implicated in the accident of manuscript, of drawing, of a-signifying scription. Leroi-Gourhan plays glottography out against the *semasiographical*¹⁶⁰ character of graphism, whose meaning depends on oral performance in contiguity with picturing: “Behind the symbolic assemblage of figures there must have been an oral context with which the symbolic assemblage was associated and whose values it reproduces in space” (ibid., 196). Against the backdrop of semasiographic graphism, a parallel development took place that would eventually lead to writing as the transcription of sounds, whose linear principle of phonetization made it grow apart from “multidimensional graphism” (ibid., 195), and had as effect in the West of narrowing the “halo of associated images” (ibid., 212), into a glottographic writing that tended toward aniconism, and moved, in its “constriction of images, toward a stricter linearization” (ibid.). Against the development of alphabetic writing, the visual arts emerged as the remainder of an initial visual plenitude, as the leftovers of a process of visual reduction.

Leroi-Gourhan’s reconstruction of past regimes of legibility/visibility in fact constitutes a diagrammatic thinking through of the viscosity of the present: the present becomes legible through the past, and vice versa, through the loop of co-creation, of the motion of the body, of corporeality. The habitus of the present makes possible the theory

¹⁶⁰ Margaret A. Jackson, invoking Elizabeth Hill Boone’s conception of semasiography, describes semasiographic as “a term that combines Greek words for ‘meaning’ and ‘graphic’ presentation. Semasiographies have recognizable signs, but their syntactic structures depend upon contextual relationships and other factors, like human participation and agency, to provide the exterior frameworks from which they derive meaning” (Jackson in Boone 2011, 231).

of *semasiographical* signification as a constellation of *Nachträglichkeit*,¹⁶¹ of productive anachronisms, in which the traces of the past extend to the present and fold back again and in which *mestizaje* is a matter of inhabiting tensions, as the provocation of the anti-identical against the dictates of a correspondence theory that can only think in terms of

¹⁶¹ In the work of Sigmund Freud, the notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, ‘deferred action,’ indicates the temporal gap between the actual experience (of trauma), its ‘life’ in the unconscious, and its repeated irruptions into the ‘present’ in the form of a symptom, its full effects intermittently reaching the surface in the ‘now.’ Deferred action makes the symptom legible as an intricate remodelling of the past experience and its ‘oblique’ (enigmatic) incursions into the present, whose ‘truth’ the analysand cannot comprehend. What matters in deferred action is not the ‘original’ moment of the trauma, but the ways in which it manifests itself as an after-effect: it is only in the present that the past becomes legible, visible, interpretable. The ‘original’ impression is always a retrospective construction. In “A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad” (Freud [1925] 1963, 207-212), Freud suggests that what is perceived and recorded (‘written’) in the ‘now,’ only takes on its effectiveness belatedly, retrospectively (cf. Freud 1963, 211-12). For an exhaustive account of the development of the notion of Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* (which was never systematically theorized by Freud), see Eickhoff 2006, 1453-1469.

In *The Return of The Real* (1996), Hal Foster uses Freud’s understanding of *Nachträglichkeit* to critique Peter Bürger’s (Hegelian) teleological narrative informing the *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984). As Foster observes, “Bürger projects the historical avant-garde as an absolute origin whose aesthetic transformations are fully significant and historically effective in the first instance” (1996, 8). Instead, Foster argues that there is a fundamental lag between object and understanding, which the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* is able to thematize. *Nachträglichkeit* operates a different model of temporality altogether, in which time is ‘compressed’ into different layers of simultaneity, where past, present and future (in the form of anticipation) are inseparable. Foster advances a reappraisal of the neo-avant-garde as a critical reworking of the historical avant-garde, thus leaving the historical avant-garde alive as a force, as a potential for new repertoires. He formulates this in counterpoint to Bürger’s death certificate of the avant-garde, who sees the neo-avant-garde as just the empty repetition of the avant-garde, the ‘neo’ lacking historical, critical importance. For Foster, the neo-avant-garde is the retrospective emergence of the historical avant-garde, since, “rather than cancel the historical avant-garde, the neo-avant-garde enacts its project for the first time – a first time that, again, is theoretically endless” (Foster 1996, 20). Furthermore, “historical and neo-avant-gardes are constituted as a continual process of protension and retension, a complex relay of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts – in short, in a deferred action that throws over any simple scheme of before and after, cause and effect, origin and repetition” (ibid., 29).

As I will show in Part 2, *Nachträglichkeit* - understood as a “complex relay of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts” - involves an eminently baroque conception of temporality. It capitalizes on the “operative function” (Deleuze 1993, 3) of the baroque, in which temporal and historical strata are folded and refolded to the extent that the very distinction between past, present, and future becomes indiscernible, as the baroque effects a flow of infinite retrofitting. It is analogous to Severo Sarduy’s central concept of *retombée*, i.e., “achronic causality, non-contiguous isomorphism, or the consequence of something that has not yet been produced, resemblance with something that for the moment does not yet exist” (Sarduy 1975, 7; my translation). The neobaroque effects an inconstancy in the distribution of past, present and future, where “the ‘consequence,’ can even precede the ‘cause’; both can be shuffled, as in a game of cards” (Sarduy qtd. in Moraña 2005, 277). For more on Sarduy’s *retombée*, see Chapter 5 (5.1.2 and 5.2.4 in particular). For his part, Haroldo de Campos (in Sullivan 2001, 372-79) reads the emergence of the Brazilian neobaroque avant-garde movement of antropofagia through Walter Benjamin’s notion of *Fortleben*, a term that also thematizes simultaneity and juxtaposition as opposed to linearity and unidirectionality. Commenting on the rich ‘afterlife’ of the baroque in Brazil, he notes that “the prevalence of the Baroque might be likened to the Benjaminian notion of *Fortleben* (‘afterlife’) through which this style can be dispersed in multiple avatars, posterior to its historical moment” (Campos 2001, 373). I will address the notion of *Fortleben* and the baroque in Chapter 5 (5.2.4).

conceptual ‘propriety’ and identity in conformity to its projection of a primordial wholeness and purity. As a discursive operation, such attempts at decoding an originary wholeness must follow the dictates of glottography, thereby missing the visual, semasiographic aspects of its object of inquiry.

I will preserve the distinction between *grafismo* and *graphism*. *Grafismo* refers to Torres-García’s conception of the system and classification of pictograms, viz. the idea of systematicity underlying his conception of ‘picture-writing,’ while *graphism* – as derived from Leroi-Gourhan – is a name for the “language of sight” which undermines the image of integrity Torres-García projects onto his system of pictorial symbols. Furthermore, *graphism* is linked to the risk Focillon associates with the hand of drawing, namely the idiosyncrasies of the line that no discourse can account for, at least not within its logical field. That this distribution of *grafismo*/*graphism* is confusing is no coincidence: *grafismo* itself already undermines its own pretence to systematicity precisely because it is open to a reading premised on a-semiotic visibility and the gestural that inform both Leroi-Gourhan and Focillon’s conception. What Torres-García does within the space of his theoretical statements is to present his *graphism* as if it were *grafismo*: the visual resistance and the aleatory nature of the work of art in its *modus operandi* is transferred, through retrospection, onto a logical plane that presents the work of art as if it were an element within a pre-set system of aniconic signification, as if it were the result of necessity. As I have tried to demonstrate however, the resistance of *graphism* can never be fully suppressed: opacity comes back to haunt the idea of system, especially in those moments when it thinks itself as having attained the ideal of transparency, as in Gradowczyk’s transcriptions. In a sense then, both *graphism* and *grafismo* are identical, except that *grafismo* speaks to the *modus significandi*, while *graphism* speaks from the perspective of the *modus operandi*, or mode of production (i.e., *manufacture*).

Graphism is but one of the disavowed means through which Torres-García’s art works produce visual analogies to institute an intimacy with the ‘pre-Columbian,’ an intimacy paradoxically produced by overstepping the boundaries of his own art philosophic discourse that frames itself as guarantor of the integrity of the ‘pre-

Columbian’ as some sort of pre-established essence, a model that can be conformed to. This intimacy is thus an effect of the work of art and the work of art is thus the model that informs that co-creates an ‘authentic,’ ‘originary,’ ‘pre-Columbian’ visibility, and not vice versa. The analogy is effected through the confusion of writing and drawing into the indeterminate praxis of *manugraphing* and not through the subsumption of the *aisthesis* of his art works under a conceptual homogeneity, under the master signifier of Abstract Man, primitive abstraction, or Andean tectonics. In the case of graphism, the indiscernibility between writing and drawing, reading and viewing – between symbol, icon, and index – produces a ‘thick’ sensory field that cuts short the “axiomatic dependence of image and concept” (Damisch 2009, 240). In this respect, Torres-García’s graphist praxis echoes - or prefigures - André Leroi-Gourhan’s notion of *graphisme*, enveloping the operating field of “the language of sight, connected with the development of the gesture-coordinating areas, the gestures being translated into graphic symbols” (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 195), out of which “mytho-graphy, based upon the manual” (*ibid.*, 196) developed in counterpoint to the “language of hearing” (*ibid.*, 195). The latter gained ascendancy with the birth of writing, of phonetic script, which, “through the device of linearity, completely subordinated graphic to phonetic expression” (*ibid.*, 195). In spite of this subordination, “an image possesses a dimensional freedom which writing must always lack,” and it is precisely this zone of freedom - of free play - that Torres-García employs to give body to his idiosyncratic graphism, whose idiosyncrasy he then, unsuccessfully, tries to discipline through the theoretical construct of *grafismo*.

Torres-García’s *grafismo* is utopian: it tries to restitute the fullness of the “language of sight” and free mythography from all mediation by phoneticism and the alphabet, a liberation which he then reads in terms of a de-colonization in terms of a return to a pure origin. However, Torres-García’s graphism, as the indeterminacy between writing and drawing, already carries with it a whole history of alphabetization; it is the condensation of a history of tension between glottography and semasiography. The theory of graphism is itself a product of coloniality, written in the language of hearing so as to provoke the memory of the language of sight and hand. That Leroi-Gourhan characterizes abstraction as the origin of art, and that “graphism did not begin with naive representations of reality but with abstraction” (1993, 188), imbues Torres-García’s

construction of the Andean tectonic paradigm - with the pre-Columbian Inca lacking phonetic script and thus, at least in Torres-García's eyes, the paragon of a culture of pure, originary abstraction - with an added layer of irony, considering the 'provenance' of Leroi-Gourhan's graphism, the Trocadéro museum in Paris. At the time of the formulation of the theory of graphism, as well as Torres-García's *grafismo* – not to mention the vogue for primitivism in Paris, the heart of the European, historical avant-garde – the disciplines of ethnology, anthropology, museology and archaeology – all grounded in colonialism – were in the process of institutional consolidation centred around the Trocadéro and its successor, the Musée de l'Homme.¹⁶²

This is the hypothesis I propose: Torres-García's compositions can be read in the mode of Cummins's unknowable tocapu, in the mode of the unknowability of graphism as the provocation of risk, and the site of production of the pre-Columbian in the light of today – as the pedagogy of hand, eye, thought. Torres-García's works do not 'transcribe' a lost world; they make visible a different regime of visibility through a mix of melancholia and play, to the point where nostalgia makes palpable a moderated fullness, rather than pure loss. His paintings are not the site of mourning, but of the playfulness – tragicomic, to be sure, given the history of colonality it hints at – of staging. His canvases simulate authenticity; they are semblances of a deep primordiality. The picture plane is the occasion for the theoretical eye to exercise its powers, and, as a parodic dénouement it must concede its short-sightedness. In spite of Torres-García's obsession in his writings to make his artworks transparently legible, there is no Rosetta stone that would make constructive universalism the canvas for the transmission of clear and

¹⁶² Over the course of this study, the Trocadéro has become a veritable 'topos.' As Randall White notes in the introduction to Leroi-Gourhan's *Gesture and Speech*, in 1929 Leroi-Gourhan "became a voluntary librarian in the newly reorganized Musée d'Ethnographie de Trocadéro, under the directorship of Paul Rivet who chose to dedicate his chair to 'the Ethnology of Modern and Fossil Humans.' Thus Leroi-Gourhan was present during the dynamic transformation of the old Trocadéro Museum into the Musée de l'Homme (officially in 1937) and was apparently heavily influenced by the experience. Even as an adjunct volunteer he was given responsibility for the Far East and for the Arctic. His first degree (1931) was in Russian, followed by another in Chinese (1933). He then studied for the 'Certificat d'Ethnologie,' a program established by Marcel Mauss and Paul Rivet in 1927. This put him in contact with the great names of French ethnology, including Marcel Griaule, Michel Leiris, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Jacques Soustelle" (1993, xiv-xv). For more on the role of the Trocadéro and 'ethnographic abstraction,' see Chapter 1 (1.3). The Trocadéro will reappear at the Conclusion of this study.

distinct ideas. His ideas are messy, *mestizaje*, scribbled in ink, scratched, etched, drawn, painted over: thick layers of histories all their own.

2.4 Manuscript and Graphism: The Work of the Hand, the Sensory Field, ‘Constructive *Mestizaje*’ and the Delegitimization of the ‘Abstract Rule’

Broadly speaking, constructive universalism’s philosophy of art is the dramatization of its own wavering: constructive universalism is a ‘precarious’¹⁶³ theory (with an equally precarious praxis as the visual transposition of this instability) in which the struggle with the sensible is staged, and re-staged in each new theoretical pronouncement, through the shifting of valences attached to figuration and abstraction, with texts emphasizing the ‘decadence’ of figuration in contrast to the ‘purity’ of archaic abstraction, while other texts focus on the ‘humanity’ of figuration as opposed to the ‘anti-humanism’ of abstraction, in which the latter is denounced as a mere formal and overly conceptual exercise. It is as if the work of art functions as constant ‘irritant’ within the feedback loop that is constructive universalism’s philosophy of art, in which each new text is a response to the viewing of an image, a sculpture or drawing informed by a previous text. The mania for revision attempts to capture the equivocality of the visual composition, without ever being able to settle on a stable dogmatic, final word, since every new work functions as the impetus for a new ‘lesson,’ a lesson provided by the sensory field of the visual. In short, what the art work does is operate as a destabilizing diagrammatic, heuristic device - a short-circuit – preventing the move towards a final, overarching theoretical pronouncement that could put constructive universalism at ease with itself. The art of constructive universalism refuses to function as the illustration of its own theory, and this

¹⁶³ The notion of precariousness informs Mari Carman Ramírez’s conception of Torres-García’s experimental works in wood, his *maderas*, which waver in the indeterminate zone between sculpture, totem, proto-installation and painting (cf. *Joaquín Torres-García: Constructing Abstraction with Wood*, especially pp. 32-50). However, one can find this precariousness on the theoretical level, as the very notion of instability makes constructive universalism such a potent praxis. It is as if its theoretical wavering finds its counterpart in the richness of its artistic output, as if the multidimensionality, the ‘messiness’ of the works is somehow the adaptation, the transposition of the pathos of the theory and its movements of statement, retraction, and reformulation. Constructive universalism is a theory that is never at ease with itself, and never attains the status of a final pronouncement, but instead keeps working out its own contradictions, caught in a dialectic without telos.

makes it such a restless discourse.¹⁶⁴ In this respect, the discourse of constructive universalism could be read as a kind of “modernist philosophy,” which, in J. M. Bernstein’s words is

the kind of philosophy that depends on art, emphatically, which is to say, it is the kind of philosophy whose task is to acknowledge the irreducible moment of sensibility *within* the concept, which is not the sensible as such (that is the reduction of sensibility that the abstract concept carries out) but the insensible within the sensible that is not another (abstract) concept but its now repudiated condition of possibility. Such art, in its turn, needs philosophy in order to reveal how its claim matters to cognition and rationality generally (how it is suppressed conceptuality writ large), how it stands as a repudiated moment of spirit (Bernstein 2006, 8-9).

In its writing, constructive universalism attempts to capture the “suppressed conceptuality” of the work of art, its invisible but legible secret as it were, while the latter in its turn is the anamnesis of discourse’s constitutive repression of the sensory moment. It is this struggle between ideality and sensuality that informs the production of texts of constructive universalism. The work of art, in its insistence on its sensory, opaque visuality, never tires of reminding constructive universalism of its ‘glossing over’ the “moment of sensibility,” of the “repressed intuitive moment of the concept” (ibid., 7) that makes Torres-García’s theory possible, and which it ‘owes’ to the art work, but can never fully account for. Needless to say, this back-and-forth that is constitutive of constructive universalism is without end, oscillating as it does between the acknowledgement of the sensory – framed as the ‘humanity’ of its own praxis as vitalist abstraction, the moments of ‘insight’ when it tries to do justice to the affects produced through art – and its repudiation by positing abstraction as simultaneously that which restrains the sensory into its proper place; it always remains to be tamed by Torres-García’s master concept, the “Universal.”

¹⁶⁴ I will return to the notion of the ‘diagrammatic’ more explicitly in Chapter 7 where I connect it with antropofagia’s *modus operandi*.

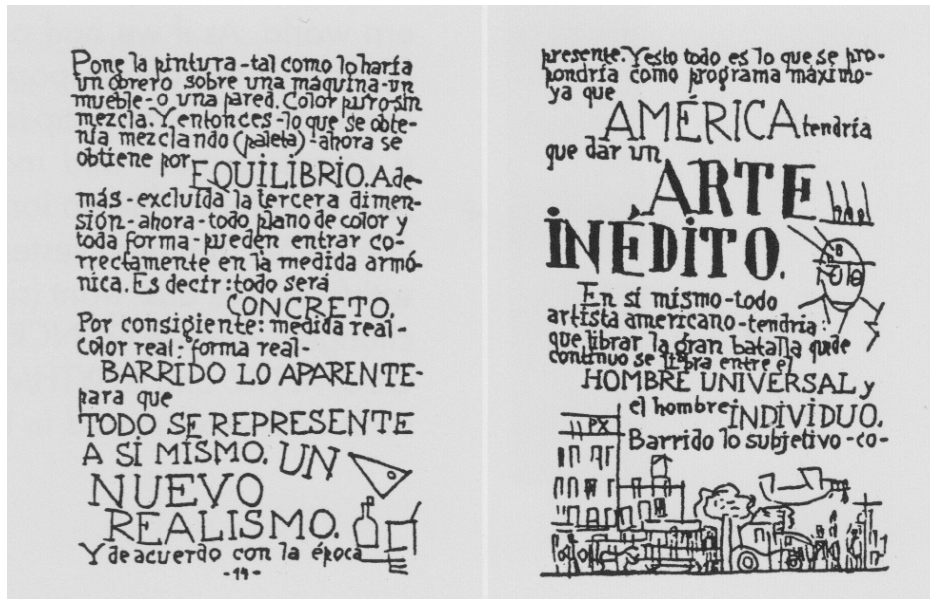


Figure 2.9 Two pages from “La regla abstracta,” handwritten/hand-drawn text by Joaquín Torres-García originally published in *Nueva escuela de arte del Uruguay: Pintura y arte constructivo*, 1946. [Ramírez, 169 (see Figure 2.6)].

This is precisely what informs the logical space of “The Abstract Rule”: art’s sensory field is minimized, and policed in the name of the universal, abstract plane that subsumes multiplicity under the all-consuming anonymity of ‘Art,’ as a gesturing toward the transcendent. Although this is a legitimate reading, it is one that only tends to the conceptual infrastructure of the text. It must however be stressed that “The Abstract Rule” produces its own “sensory field” (Lyotard) as restitution for the suppressions of sensibility that made its conceptual frame possible. Lyotard’s “sensory field” is the space of the gaze within discourse (cf. Lyotard 2011, 38), the locus where visibility insinuates itself within the texture of language, of voice and written word. The paradigmatic case for this space of sensibility – and the chiasmic interrelation of the conceptual and the sensory that gives rise to sense – is designation, whose space is “neither the grid of the system nor the line of speech” (ibid., 36). The words ‘where is here’ for example, encompass a movement, a gesture engendering a dynamic visibility that receives the name ‘here,’ where “indicated place - the here - is included in a *sensory field*, of which it is no doubt the focal point, but not such that its margins are eliminated” (ibid., 36; emphasis in original). In fact, visibility is what frames the ‘here’ since “the margins remain, in the uncertain, undeniable, and curvilinear presence of what stands at the

periphery of vision, as an absolutely necessary reference to the indication of place ... but whose nature is completely at odds with that of a linguistic operation. The latter relates to a discontinuous inventory, while sight relates to a topological space” (ibid. 37). Language is constitutively riven by the visual, the opacity of that which it wants to grasp in words, whereas, at the same time, the ‘logical field’ of discourse circumscribes visibility. Lyotard provides a reading-viewing of Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés* which brings out the productive interaction between the visual field of the typographical arrangement - the “sensory space” (68) - and the “logical space” (ibid.), the space of signification. It is this viscosity that also speaks in the theoretical-visual imagetext “The Abstract Rule.”

In counterpoint to its claims to universality, “The Abstract Rule,” as handwritten text where drawings interweave into a hybrid imagetext,¹⁶⁵ presents itself as both a space of alphabetic legibility and a sensory space of visibility. It is a space for the transcription of speech – alphabetic, phonological writing – and a space of viscosity restaging its gestural genesis, the moment of drawing and writing (Figure 2.9 and 2.10).

¹⁶⁵ W. J. T. Mitchell explains the distribution of the conceptual trinity image/text, imagetext, and image-text as follows: “I will employ the typographic convention of the slash to designate ‘image/text’ as a problematic gap, cleavage, or rupture in representation. The term ‘imagetext’ designates composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine images and text. ‘Image-text,’ with a hyphen, designates relations of the visual and the verbal” (Mitchell 1994, 89). Torres-García’s manuscripted texts can in fact be considered as comprising all three aspects: as imagetexts, in their combination of image and words – presenting images as words and words appearing as images (imagetext as interface) – the manuscripted compositions thrive on the tension between image and word (‘image/text’), making the disjunction between visibility and legibility a manifest material ‘theme’ of the ‘imagetext,’ while at the same time constituting a meditation on the relations – the relay – between reading and viewing (‘image-text’).

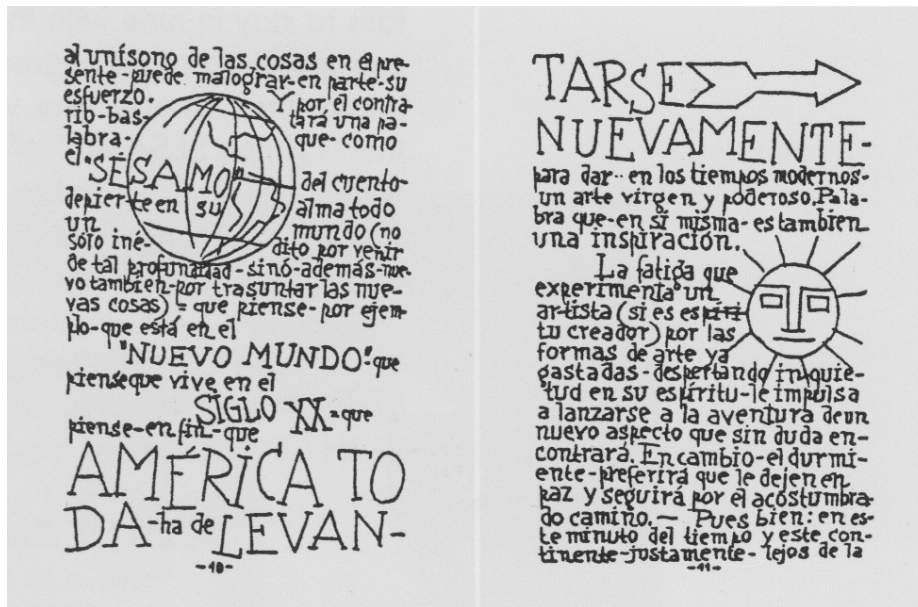


Figure 2.10 Two pages from “La regla abstracta,” handwritten/hand-drawn text by Joaquín Torres-García originally published in *Nueva escuela de arte del Uruguay: Pintura y arte constructivo*, 1946. [Ramírez, 169 (see Figure 2.6)].

The imagetext “The Abstract Rule” embeds its own irony: the idiosyncrasy of the gestural, pointing back to a hand that does not disappear into moveable type, in combination with drawings that do not illustrate the words but interrupt our reading, conspire to bring the universal down to earth, through a tactic of *manuscript* that counters the logical space with its pretence of subsumption – of the emptying out of the sensory through the conceptual so as to give rise to the fantasy of a ‘universal,’ disembodied, anonymous ‘Art’ – with the irreverence of manual labour – signed “J. Torres-García,” dated “Febrero 5 de 1946”: the universal has its own date of manufacture (Figure 2.11) – and the evocation of the tactility of writing as drawing, and drawing as writing. Manuscript is precisely the term that denotes Torres-García’s characteristic practice of producing textures that evince a “visual doubleness as both writing and drawing” (Sarabia 2010, 300), with the two activities sharing in the movement of the hand, as ‘script’ derives from Greek *skariphasthai*, meaning “to scratch an outline,” “to tear,” “to sketch.” The imagetext ‘tears open’ the temporal order of alphabetical linearity; it interrupts the alphabetic eye and opens the way to a “meaning that is not subjected to

successivity, to the order of a logical time, or the irreversible temporality of sound” (Derrida 1976, 86). Manuscript punctures the unilateralism of glottography and injects it with the multidimensionality of graphism (cf. Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 195), releasing onto the page a “halo of associated images” (ibid., 212) in their opacity, in their resistance to legibility. The page becomes image, oscillating between the visible and the legible, a canvas for ‘scription’ where the hand and the ‘language of sight’ exercise their dominion, reducing the ‘language of hearing’ to a faint whisper.

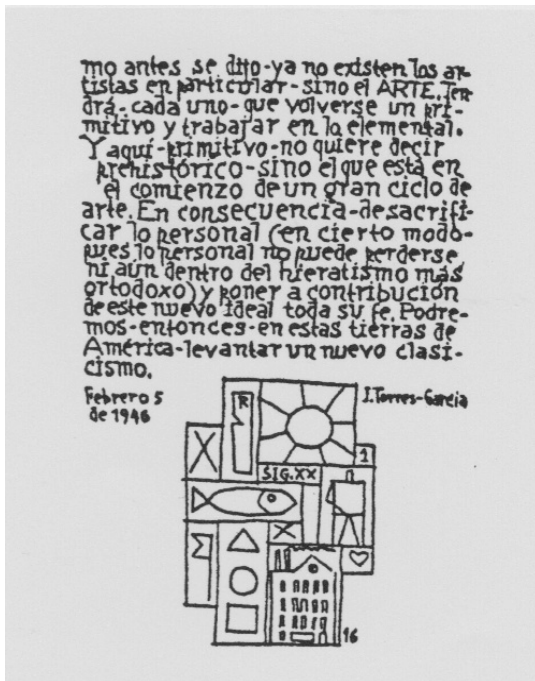


Figure 2.11 Final page of “La regla abstracta,” handwritten/hand-drawn text by Joaquín Torres-García originally published in *Nueva escuela de arte del Uruguay: Pintura y arte constructivo*, 1946. [Ramírez, 169 (see Figure 2.6)].

Speaking of the work of visual artists León Ferrari (Figure 2.12) and Mira Schendel, Luis Pérez-Oramas speaks of an “aesthetics of confusion” (2009, 29), a phrase that is just a suitable for Torres-García’s manuscripted theoretical texts, which, through their very corporeality, immediately put the theoretical claims of the Uruguayan artist, speaking as he does from an idealist perspective made possible by his disavowal of the labour and effects of the work of art, under immense pressure. The work of the hand makes the cerebral claims of his words absurd; the materiality of the text parodies the ephemeralization he projects onto his visual praxis. What “The Abstract Rule” makes

visible, in spite of the clarity of its logical claims, are the spasms of language, its visual artifice. With this in mind, Mira Schendel and León Ferrari become legible as the inheritors of Torres-García's manuscript, two Latin American artists whose works

describe an ingrown, interconnected language, a written materiality, language as a trembling of the hand, a shudder of the body – language that itself has shuddered, a language that voices an idiosyncratic, irreplaceable subject. Of course, their art involves ideas and concepts, indeed, often ideas and concepts in their barest state (...). But these things are depicted in a physical circumstance, where the materiality of signs and symbols resonates like a dissonant, distorting echo of the ideal and perhaps fictional purity of the mind and ideas. Perhaps this, in one sense at least, is what the tumult of language means to these two artists: that words are opaque and out in the world (Pérez-Oramas 2009, 15).

Torres-García formulates his belief in the “purity of the mind and ideas,” his faith in the transcendent, Platonic sphere of universal, trans-historical abstraction – primordial ‘Abstract Man’ –, through the idiosyncrasy of a “language that itself has shuddered” through old, weary bones (he wrote this text one year before his death at age 74).

However, this is not to say that manuscript is the innermost, authentic transcription of individuality, that elusive “irreplaceable subject” – a graphological analysis would tell us nothing. Manuscript, like graphism, is constructive universalism's staging of authenticity through the artifice of writing/drawing. Manuscript can be read as the reworking of moveable type into idiosyncrasy, as a means of producing an “irreplaceable subject” as an effect of writing, as after-image. This also opens up the question of the precariousness of concepts such as ‘medium’ and ‘genre.’ Manuscript shows that the ‘work’ of the work of art resides in its ability to produce its own medium and reconfigure genres, creating itself as its own model. Manuscript is *mestizaje*; it is both drawing and writing. It is also neither of these in that it lives off the tension between both ‘media’ and produces something new, something that provokes a neologism such as ‘manuscript,’ a type of art, a new genre, (a new medium even, as a reflection on the essential ‘mixedness’ of media, similar to León Ferrari's series of ‘written paintings’?) whose history and genealogy can now be

Torres-García's manuscript/manugraphics re-situates calligraphy and drawing onto the same sensory field, holding the logical field of his discourse – his 'abstract ruling' as intimating the "purity of the mind and ideas" – in abeyance. The hand makes the law of abstraction opaque, illegible, illogical through the aesthesis of scription (*écriture*), as a counter-logic (a logic against logic), as the refutation of the rule, its self-infringement. 'Scription,' as the drawing out of the corporeality of writing, brings back form and restores a thickness to language, a gestural opacity, an improvisational moment constituting the production of words and drawing as well as affecting the moment of reading and viewing. Scription is the provocation of the resistance between the muscularity of the hand – scription is the "muscular act of writing, of drawing letters" (Barthes qtd. in Pérez-Oramas 2009, 18) and the material, the medium that will shape the form of the work. As Roland Barthes notes, scription encodes a gesture, "this gesture by which a hand picks up a tool (point, reed, pen), presses it to a surface, advances it heavily or caressingly, and traces regular, recurrent, rhythmic forms" (1985, 102). It is the moment where hand and material resistance meet and provoke the accident, a moment that always holds out the possibility of surprise, the surprise "The Abstract Rule" makes visible on the page but which its discourse, as the ephemeralization of the *modus operandi* it owes its existence to, denies. Torres-García's drawing of words prepares a reading against the grain of the logical field as the only reading possible that would give pictoriality its due.

Paradoxically, and despite its perhaps post-modern feel, Torres-García's praxis of manuscript was born from a decidedly anachronistic, anti-modern, anti-avant-garde disposition. It was formulated in line with his desire for the primordial, the archaic as the most authentic expression of 'Abstract Man.' His essentially "regressive gesture that harks back to a time prior to the Gutenberg revolution of 500 years earlier" (Sarabia 2010, 298), evinces a complex interrelation of past, present and future. The most ancient is presented as the preparation for a leap into the future: the way back to the pre-Columbian is figured as the only way South America can go forward.

Rosa Sarabia characterizes Torres-García's manuscript in terms of an evasive manoeuvre with respect to technologies of reproducibility – as a willed obsolescence:

In this retrospective voyage, Torres-García not only avoided the printing press but also the typewriter which, like the photographic camera, necessarily modified modes of representation due to its imposition of mechanization, standardization and serialization. He made *hand*-writing (quite literally, ‘manu-scripture’) into an art, a craft/penmanship (Sarabia 2010, 298; italics in original).

This nostalgia associated with the hand is equally apparent in the theories of André Leroi-Gourhan and Henri Focillon, whose concept of graphism and theory of forms ‘in praise of hands,’ respectively, were formulated in counterpoint to the rise of mass communication, print culture, photography, increased industrialization, standardization and technological innovation.¹⁶⁸ Focillon announces a terrible fate for the hand, sealed in the monstrosity of the “handless eye,” the camera:

At last the cruel inertia of the photograph will be attained by a handless eye, repelling our sympathy even while attracting it, a marvel of light, but a passive monster. Photography is like the art of another planet (...). Even when the photograph represents crowds of people, it is the image of solitude, because the hand never intervenes to spread over it the warmth and flow of human life (Focillon 1989, 174).

This pathos of a lost fullness and fascist, apocalyptic techno-dystopianism is echoed in Leroi-Gourhan’s *Gesture and Speech*, which develops a speculative theory of graphism – as the originary unity between speech, gesture and image in an abstract semasiography torn asunder through the subsequent innovation of glottography – is formulated against, on the one hand, the history of an aniconic, dematerialized system of phonetization and on the other hand a history of figuration under the spell of excessive realism, of which the photograph, in its slavishness to the phenomenal world, is the most hyperbolic development.

A fact of particular relevance in our present context is that graphism certainly did not start by reproducing reality in a slavishly photographic manner. On the contrary, we see it develop over the space of some ten thousand years from signs which, it would appear, initially expressed rhythms rather than forms (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 190).

¹⁶⁸ For a more extensive discussion of nostalgia, and the distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia proposed by Svetlana Boym (2002), see Chapter 1, section 1.2.

The hand seemed to bring back the memory of a time before reification, of a time before the split between the ‘language of hearing’ and a ‘language of sight,’ a time where hand, eye and voice worked in perfect coordination on an abstract, rhythmic plane of expressivity. This, at least, is the counter-image graphism and Focillon’s praise of hands construct in the formulation of their theories, although both, in their insistence on the irreducibility of materiality and chance, have proven invaluable as critical tools for the (self-)deconstruction of Torres-García’s logical field, as was shown in the previous section. Ironically, Torres-García constructed his primordial, artisanal Inca-ideal through the juxtaposition of photographic material documenting pre-Columbian artefacts and sites. Since he never visited the actual archaeological locations, Torres-García used archival material to compose his paradigm of authentic, tectonic abstraction by a tactic of tracing and thereby producing a regime of (photographic) visual analogies (see Figures 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6 and 8.7) that attested, in his view at least, to the origin and essence of art in the abstract rule, of which constructive universalism would be the true heir.¹⁶⁹

Torres-García adds a decolonizing twist to the validation of the artisanal work of the humble hand. The de-articulation of the idealist “Abstract Rule” - its disembodied dominion - through Torres-García’s graphism - in direct contradiction to the system of *grafismo* - resonates with Leroi-Gourhan’s conception of the primordality of abstraction, that art’s origin is located in abstraction, that abstraction marks the essence of primitivity: “There is no word more appropriate than ‘primitive’ to describe the first known art works. We thus see that primitive art began in abstraction or even in the pre-figurative” (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 372). Constructive universalism is then the composition of an image of primordality along Leroi-Gourhan’s dictum that “graphism did not begin with naive representation of reality but with abstraction” (ibid., 188). Phonation and alphabetic writing instigated a drift from the original plenitude of rhythmic, semasiographic expressions into a linear system of transcription, paralleled by a graphic practice that developed, in counterpoint to phonetization, along an axis of increased figuration and

¹⁶⁹ This disconnect between theory and praxis, in which the conceptual purity of ‘Abstract Man’ is predicated on a *modus operandi* that involves technological reproduction, archival research, the *objet trouvé* in flea markets, collage and montage has never been taken into account in studies of Torres-García’s work. The aim of the following chapter, as well as the Conclusion, is to remedy some of this blindness.

realism. Constructive universalism, as the staging of the original ‘semasiographic attitude’ fits within what Leroi-Gourhan perceives as a return, through avant-garde arts, to the moment before the severance of the language of hearing and the language of sight, in which “the search for pure rhythmicity, for the nonfigurative in modern art and poetry (born as it was of the contemplation of the arts of living primitive peoples), represents a regressive escape into the haven of primitive reactions as much as it does a new departure” (ibid., 192). From the perspective of Torres-García’s complicity with the discourse of primitivity, manuscript and graphism do not so much become visible as gestures of deconstruction through pictorialism as regressive fantasies that propose an aesthetic solution to colonization. Decolonization becomes a matter of the aestheticization of glottography - of loosening its oppressive linearity - as a way to return to an origin that Western epistemology had created for itself. That the Inca did not communicate through the artifice of glottographic writing makes the Inca appear as the paradigm of the archaic par excellence, as yet untouched by the decadence of figuration, or the strict linearity of phonetization (which led to the Gutenberg revolution and the mechanization of language, following Leroi-Gourhan’s and Focillon’s artisanal logic). Made visible through the device of primitivism, the Inca becomes the repository of radical alterity, a radical obsolescence that functions as the inverted image to the West’s self-conception as the most technologically advanced (and most reified) sphere of existence, as always ahead of its own time. This must have been what attracted Torres-García to the Inca, and what made him the incarnation of what the Uruguayan artists had been so desperate to ‘discover’: an uncompromised, authentic geometric abstraction.

Paradoxically, the Inca – as made in the counter-image of Western civilization – is the image of de-coloniality, as holding the secret of a way back to a time before the parting of ways of eye, hand and ear. The Inca is presented as outside of history, and therefore as the means to a radically utopian new time, a time against the dystopia of mechanized, empty clock-time. The Inca is naturalized as inhabiting a time of ritual, cosmic time: the way to the future - the way of desire - is the way back, so as to institute a definite break with the now by plunging into this fantasy of primordiality. Cultural independence from the ‘North’ and the beginning of the ‘School of the South’ requires

the Renaissance of semasiography and the ritual interaction with abstract, tocapu-like designs.

Of course, what is missed in this description is the problem of purity that manuscript plays out through its *modus operandi*. Manuscript, as well as graphism, constitute visual fields that expressly counteract ideals of purity, by making truth – the idea of truth as the most originary, as what is most unspoilt – visible as the effect of passages through complex circuits of scriptural-pictorial economies, thereby giving rise to an unknowable domain of aesthesis, of an affectivity arising from texts and images that exceed all clear conceptual capture through a diffuse amalgamation of reading, writing, drawing, viewing. It is unclear where precisely the point of epistemology is located in a hybrid text such as “The Abstract Rule,” since the visual works against the integrity of the verbal, or rather, it makes the verbal appear under a markedly pictorial aspect, thus charging writing with indecipherability.

Truth is thus displaced from the space of ‘the abstract rule’ – the rule of the alphabetic eye in conjunction with voice and its ‘correct,’ faithful transcription – into a different regime of legibility, constituting a text that ‘thickens’ – takes on depth – through the sensory field of the image. Through the interpolation of drawings within the text, conferring legibility on the images, and the corresponding movement of the written words becoming drawing-like, conferring visibility onto the words, the imagetext thus produces a zone of indiscernibility between reading and viewing. Moreover, this very indiscernibility points to the historicity of conceptualizations of legibility, in that ‘legibility’ – and the meaning of reading itself – was a contested site that gradually solidified into the image of reading as deciphering, as the restitution, the reanimation, of the written, alphabetic sequence into ‘living’ speech. However, as the imagetext shows, what is at stake is not so much restitution as *discernment*. As Walter Mignolo points out, the indeterminacy of discernment opens the question of coloniality as the encounter – or rather, the missed encounter – of conceptualizations of legibility, in which the Amerindian pictographic regimes of legibility had the potential of reminding the Western cultures of the book – the scriptural economies – of the repression of visibility that lay at

the foundation of the canonical conception of writing as the transcription of speech, and the attendant alphabetization of all knowledge.

The increasing relevance of alphabetic writing in Western culture contributed to the change in meaning of the Latin verb *legere* (to read). One of its original meanings was ‘to discern.’ Its meaning changed when it began to be applied to discerning the letters of the alphabet in a text, thus acquiring the modern sense of reading (Mignolo 1994, 253).

The colonial (missed) encounter consolidated this regime of legibility. The concept of legibility itself, in the form of glottography, hastened the de-pictorialization of Amerindian ideogrammatic and pictographic semiosis. The paradigm of the legible, i.e., the ‘Divine Book,’ was inextricably linked to its material manifestation as a codex. This format served as the model for the incorporation into an alphabetic regime of legibility. Reading, properly understood, was to occur through the regimentation of the letter of the text (signifier), and its reassembly into to the spirit of the text (the signified); discernment no longer intimated a continuum of image and word, but a determinate discontinuity. Owing to the profound aniconism of this image of language, alternate systems which placed great importance on visuality were deemed idolatrous and were repressed in the name of the Word. Other practices – such as the Inca *quipu* – were deemed irrelevant, ‘primitive’ or childish, immature and crude, since the Western regime of legibility had no way of ‘discerning’ alternate conceptions and practices of reading as meaningful; it could only discern lack.¹⁷⁰

A similar development took place with regards to the canonization of figuration during the process of the inscription of the ‘New World’ into the Western pictorial economy. Undergoing its own profound shift in notions of discernibility, from medieval symbolism to Renaissance naturalism, the West, through the device of perspective – and

¹⁷⁰ For a detailed exposition of the encounter between Western legibility and Amerindian counter-practices, and the start of the colonial inscription of the Amerindian regimes of legibility/visibility – namely, the suppression of ideogrammatic systems and alternate views on what it means to read and write – see Walter Mignolo’s “Signs and Their Transmission: The Question of the Book in the New World,” in Boone and Mignolo 1994, 220-270.

its aura of scientificity¹⁷¹ – invested more and more energy in the representation of the phenomenal as the guarantee of truth and fidelity. Visibility was increasingly stipulated in terms of resemblance to what it construed as the ‘observable world,’ while charging visual art with the task of illusionism, of producing ‘life-like’ representations with a narrative, dramatic core, with geometry “at the service of representation.” Mimeticism, necessarily figurative in orientation, is itself a convention in which the figure is taken to be a transposition of the phenomenal world brought into the realm of representation, thus open to inspection, and coordinate with a notion of truth as correctness. Viewing is then the process of reading the phenomenal back into the painting, of recognizing figures and correspondences, and of constructing the dramatic action – the perspectival *istoria*¹⁷² – of the image, which may or may not be the occasion for deeper reflection (e.g. the still life as *memento mori*, scenes invested with moralizing, allegorical signification). The image is thus not expressive of meaning of its own accord, and is always in need of discourse to bring out its truth value: figuration and naturalism seem to go hand in hand with the alphabetization of knowledge into discourse, as the latter makes explicit what the former can only show indirectly. A strict division of labour is thus instituted between showing and telling, viewing and explaining, image and word – the classical, representational regime, to use Rancière’s phrase.¹⁷³ In the process, the non-figurative becomes illegible, invisible to an extent. Geometric patterns, the recurrence of shapes and abstract forms are framed as ‘decorative,’ as devoid of meaning, and ultimately expendable. It becomes the province of craft, of ‘applied art,’ whereas ‘fine art’ is the domain of the meaningful. The genius of Torres-García is then that he made Indo-American culture, and Inca artefacts in

¹⁷¹ In counterpoint to an atavistic conception of aura, like the one proposed by Benjamin and subsequently critiqued by Adorno (cf. remarks above; see also the discussion of Benjaminian aura in relation to nostalgia in Chapter 1, 1.2), there is the aura of technology, machinolatry, the fetishization of high-tech. This machinolatry is usually associated with Futurism. It could be argued that it stems from the same conceptual substratum of ‘aura,’ but reveals a diametrically opposed valuation (where there are no machines, one cannot wait for their advent; where there are too many, one longs for those rustic days of yore).

¹⁷² For just one helpful discussion (amongst countless others) of Leon Battista Alberti’s notion of *istoria* in relation to perspective as he saw it in *Della Pittura* (1435), in which perspective is a compositional means that balances the overall scene, see Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), especially 35, 95-97, 385-389.

¹⁷³ See the General Introduction for a discussion of Rancière’s terminology.

particular, newly legible as art through the paradigm of geometric abstraction he brought with him after his European aesthetic education.

Inca art, owing to the fact that “the overall Andean concept of representation is based on geometric abstraction” (Cummins 1994, 202) is ‘invisible’ to eyes disciplined in mimetic visual literacy. Mimesis, as the bias of legibility toward pictorial narrativity, has no eye for meaningful abstraction. Inca art, with its enigmatic reworking of stone outcrops, the integration of the landscape into a continuum of artifice and nature, the variety and structural modulations of its masonry, the patterning of abstract motifs on textiles, pottery and the overall ‘abstract mood’ of its approach¹⁷⁴ – all this refinement in compositional, structural relations went largely unnoticed to the colonizer, in contrast to the more ‘baroque’ art of the Mexica. Since figuration was present in the latter’s works, “almost from the beginning in Mexico there was a much greater from of synchronization between Native and European art” (Cummins 1994, 210), whereas autochthonous Inca abstraction was wholly bypassed and native artists resorted to European models instead. “Peruvian representation does not seem to have been used to represent itself or things Andean for a Spanish audience, but needed to be translated into European models,” whereas “Mexican figural images entered directly into the record” (ibid., 192), since the Mexican pictorial structure of signification already resounded on some level with the demands of intelligibility of Renaissance Europe. The incorporation of Inca abstraction within the circuit of the European mimetic-pictorial economy amounted to an aestheticization, an erasure of meaning, and the relegation of Peru into some decorative hinterland – a nation of craftsmen, but surely not artists – in the European imaginary.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ The abstract geometric orientation of Inca art will be touched upon briefly in the Conclusion when dealing with Torres-García’s ‘emulations’ of Inca masonry, in the discussion of the grid-wall paintings he made in Montevideo during the latter half of the thirties. For some outstanding explorations of Inca art, see Carolyn Dean’s *A Culture of Stone: Inka Perspectives on Rock*, César Paternosto’s *The Stone and the Thread*, as well as *Abstraction: The Amerindian Paradigm*, which includes contributions by Paternosto as well as Lucy Lippard, Mary Frame, Ferndinán Valentin and Cecilia de Torres, a publication that focuses explicitly on Inca abstraction and its reworking in contemporary art. Due to the scope of the present work, the full complexity of Inca abstraction can only be hinted at.

¹⁷⁵ In his essay “Representation in the Sixteenth Century and the Colonial Image of the Inca,” (in Boone and Mignolo 1994, 187-217), Tom Cummins focuses on the *quipu*, textile, paintings on wood and *keros* as examples of Inca art that were translated into the representational regime of mimesis in order to make the artifacts intelligible to a European audience, since these works, “which signified through structure,”

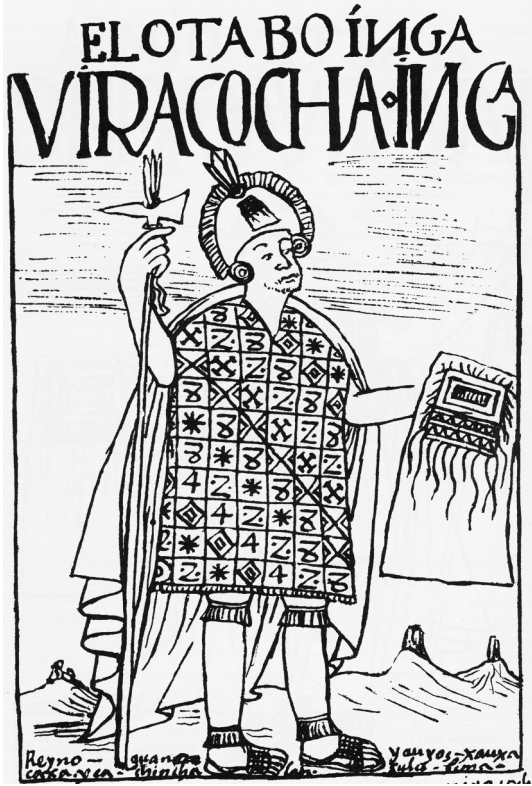


Figure 2.13 Drawing by Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, showing Viracocha Inca wearing a tunic with a tocapu design. [Ananda, Cohen Suarez and Jeremy James George, *Handbook to Life in the Inca World* (New York: Facts On File, 2011), 178].

For instance, the imagery of Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, the Quechua-speaking native who illustrated his *First New Chronicle and Good Governance* (1614-15) with a whole series of drawings allowing a glimpse of post-conquest Inca life, is already a locus of the inscription within the Western pictorial canon since “all the European compositional techniques are brought into play so as to suggest place, space, time and event. Order in Guamán Poma’s drawing is used to create a pictorial narrative of ritual”

“dependent on form and color as signifying agents,” and therefore too “abstract and intractable” (Cummins 1994, 198) to enter directly into accounts of Inca culture, had to be transposed – that is to say, figuratively represented, thus *reduplicated* – within colonial records in order to become legible/visible and thus intelligible. However, through this transposition, this circumscription, the abstractions, which received their significance by virtue of their color and formal arrangements, lost their immediate expressivity; the drawing of an abstract, anti-mimetic configuration within a figurative paradigm forces it to signify mimetically, thus obscuring – through literal misrepresentation – its directly expressive, meaning-generating function within the original Inca context.

(Cummins 1994, 201). The images are thus a literal misrepresentation of ritual; they are its ‘profanation’ so to speak. The Inca ritual, which owes its meaningfulness precisely through being abstract, since abstraction is expressive and not representative of the sacred, is forced to go through the circuit of re-presentation and thereby aestheticize itself – in a sense, it has already become folklore (Figure 2.13). Because of this necessary strategy of transposition, the inherent meaning of abstract designs was obfuscated, leaving only the aesthetic, decorative ‘remainder’ for Western eyes to consume, enjoy, and forget.

There is something of the tragic and the parodic in this transposition. It is tragic, since colonial adaptation is necessary to ensure intelligibility, an intelligibility which was vital considering Guamán Poma de Ayala’s *Chronicle* was written as a denunciation of how indigenous Peruvians were mistreated by the Spanish. It was in fact a massive imagetext addressed to King Philip III in the hopes of improving their situation. It is also parodic in the sense that it encompasses a double speech, a ‘parallel canto’¹⁷⁶ operating the figuration of abstraction. It gives material form to the inevitability of the rerouting of the pre-conquest tradition of geometric abstraction through mimeticism as the only detour available through which the ‘ruins,’ the minimal traces of a once vital abstraction, can be made to reverberate, however faintly, in the background.¹⁷⁷ A case in point is the fate of the *kero*, the Inca ritual drinking vessel, whose initial abstract patterns and color combinations were gradually replaced by figurative, narrative depictions attesting to the conversion of Inca abstraction to European allegory – “a category of meaning nonexistent in pre-Hispanic art” (Cummings 1994, 210) – and narrativity.

¹⁷⁶ My use of the term *parody* is derived from Mari Carmen Ramírez’s (1999) understanding of the concept as implying “the creation of a counter-discourse or parallel canto” as it “sets up a critical parallelism” (18-19), which she developed in the publication *Parallel Cantos*. It is precisely this interaction between parallel discourses that generates a critical distancing that is “distinguished by an ironic inversion,” as Linda Hutcheon insists (1985, 6).

¹⁷⁷ In this sense, parallel canto is similar to Walter Benjamin’s notion of allegory. Poma’s image is a composite of heterogeneous elements: a collage-image of abstraction and figuration, ‘retrofitted’ from the scraps of an ancient cosmology made to reverberate in a new, unfamiliar setting. The ruins are transmogrified into a hybrid texture of contradictions, a space of cohabitation where irreducible regimes of legibility and visibility mingle into an enigmatic drawing whose lesson we are only now beginning to learn. For more on Benjamin’s notion of allegory, see Chapter 1 (1.2).

Through the erosion operated by time and the workings of coloniality, the rituality of geometric abstraction – as a register producing historical continuity within Inca legibility/visibility – could only be approximated through its adaptation to the European signifying regime of representation. Within this new, hybrid system, the ‘pre-Inca’ was born as signifier of the loss of the imagined, reconstructed immediacy of geometric abstract communicability, the loss of its *direct expressivity* and rituality Torres-García so ardently longs for. This already attest to the complexity of the interrelatedness of the pre-Inca and Inca, in that, ultimately, there is no difference between the two, since they are both the product of a profound shift in legibility/visibility. This ‘world collapse’¹⁷⁸ makes any attempt at the wholesale ‘recovery’ of a past (postulated as ‘pure’) as always already compromised, as necessarily complicit, if only through the means of representation which ensure intelligibility. In fact, what self-conscious colonial imagery – as hybrid, painfully self-aware of the interruption of the historical continuum in a ‘pre-’ and ‘post-Columbian,’ as well as equally aware of the artificiality of this division as the colonizer’s bequest, as well as the conceptual pair abstract/figurative – attests to is the impossibility of return, since the object of desire – the pre-Columbian – is the effect of coloniality. By superimposing the abstract and the figurative, Guamán Poma’s composite image reveals the actuality of *mestizaje*, and exposes the ‘rhetoric of purity’ (cf. Cheetham 1991) as an exclusionary ideology. The rhetoric of purity, as the discourse of totalitarian ‘restorative nostalgia’ (cf. Boym 2002) equates its fantasy of the Edenic origin with absolute truth, a

¹⁷⁸ Martin Heidegger’s notion of “world collapse,” at least how Hubert Dreyfus understands the term (cf. Dreyfus 2005, 16) can shed some light on the ‘symbolic death’ of the colonized attendant upon the cataclysmic events of invasion, genocide, enslavement and colonization. World collapse not only refers to the situation when the meaning of words have suddenly changed, but when language itself, and the ‘structural grammar’ of experience (*habitus*), has changed beyond recognition, quite literally so. It is when “the totality of involvements of the ready-to-hand and the present-to-hand discovered within-the-world is, as such, of no consequence; it collapses into itself; the world has the character of completely lacking significance” (Heidegger 1994, 186). Initially, the world operates along wholly different, inchoate, obscure regimes of legibility/visibility, which makes it appear unintelligible, forcing one to submit to the discourse of the master without having a clue what it means. The event of colonialism involves the ‘impossible possibility’ of the ousting of an understanding of being, a tradition, and its replacement by an alien configuration of intelligibility whose contours one cannot even yet discern. It turns the world upside-down by forcing a new code in its place: the world becomes incoherent in the moment of transposition from one regime of legibility to the other, from the ‘pre-Colonial’ to the ‘colonial.’ The distinction between ‘pre-Colonial’ and ‘post-colonial’ – and in this particular case the distinction between the pre- and the post-colonial – then becomes visible as but the effect of the impossible possibility, in that the time before the event can no longer be thematized other than through the language of retrospection. It is spoken from a position that has already made the ‘new world’ intelligible through the ontology of the vanquisher.

truth untarnished by the ‘impurity’ of the present. It is this truth that constructive universalism cannot bear to see, and which its discourse is so desperate to repress. The image – the construct – of the pre-Columbian is both effect and cause; it is what is longed for as well as that which must be disavowed to make purity and ‘decontamination’ from the colonial thinkable. It is an impossibility, since figuration – and the historical accretions it carries along with it – cannot think outside of its own rules of composition and not “suggest place, space, time and event” (Cummings 1994, 210).

As Tom Cummins suggests with respect to a depiction on a colonial *kero* of 1700, its imagery already attests to the impossibility of extracting oneself out of the actuality of the colonial situation, by revealing itself as a fantasy bathed in an aura of profound melancholia, and an equally profound messianism if one is set on overturning – to use Torres-García’s phrasing – the ‘decadence’ of ‘imported models,’ namely, the regime of visibility of naturalism (as geometry *in the service of* representation).

The imagery itself signifies the impossibility of such a return because the signifying system is European. These scenes, in which only archaic, pre-Hispanic figures operate, are a response to the sense of estrangement from tradition. They at once acknowledge the remoteness of the past and a desire to redeem it for the present. As allegory, the pictorial scenes are one text through which another can be read. In this case, in the Andean case, the text is messianic. It is the return of the Inca and the restitution of native autonomy, a desire to which the scene shown here ultimately refers in the form of the colonial myth *Incari*, a myth that is still held in areas around Cuzco and which posits the return of the Inca. Thus the past is signified through a European system, the artistic form of acculturation, conveys an entirely different sense of the past; the past now is painted as a form of resistance to the present (ibid.).¹⁷⁹

Similarly, Torres-García’s *grafismo* can be read as such a “form of resistance to the present.” However, the nostalgic resistance of the hybrid, ‘acculturated’ image is replaced by a dogmatic messianism predicated on the demand for the absolute de-figuration of art as a means to attain – to regress back to – the primordial, authentic purity of geometric abstraction, with the latter constructed as the image of the non-colonial

¹⁷⁹ This resistance to the present can be read as the utopian potential inherent in ‘reflective nostalgia.’ For more on Svetlana Boym’s concept of ‘reflective nostalgia’ and what distinguishes it from ‘restorative nostalgia,’ see Chapter 1 (1.2).

which must be redeemed. As his own idiosyncratic envisioning of the *Incarí* myth, Torres-García's constructive universalism, with its theory of *grafismo* and the logic of legibility informing it, is not just a theory, but amounts to an ethical injunction, to a prescription of legibility: to do justice to the primordial, to the authentically 'pre-Columbian,' one must read the pictograms as exclusively symbolic, as metaphoric only. To misread is to colonize, to hybridize, to confuse figuration and abstraction. Regardless of what the mimetic eye might tell you, ideograms must not be read through the matrix of the phenomenal but as indices of a deeper, invisible realm of direct epiphany within an abstract universe of immediately signifying elements. If pictograms do resemble things in the world, then this resemblance must be interpreted as merely incidental; resemblance on the phenomenal level has to be suppressed in order for the full ritual potential of the visual item to manifest itself. In a sense then, one must read *against* the iconicity of the pictogram: within *grafismo*, pictograms are images *of* things despite themselves. If the fish-pictogram looks like a fish, its 'fishiness' does not essentially resound with the phenomenal, but with the deeper essence it stands for: nature and instinct. What Torres-García hopes for is the restitution of a society in which the fish pictogram would be directly present as instinct or nature, thus skipping the detour of re-presentation altogether. The disavowal of iconicity – the suppression of the sensory – is the strengthening of utopia: only through the disavowal can the dream attain its full force, can the realization of geometric thought as essence of the primitive be made good. This suppression however is also the ideological moment of the utopian, in an almost literal sense as intimating the logos of the idea, and warding off the sensory field – the zone of likeness and semblance lodged within the notion of the idea. However, what Torres-García could not allow in the logical field of his writing, he demonstrates in the sensory fields of manuscript, of drawing by hand, his *maderas*, his paintings – all these works that counter the Platonic operation through their *mestizaje*.

Manuscript and graphism (as well as hypericonicity) can be reconsidered through the Quecha word *quilca*. The word itself thematizes indeterminacy as well as unknowability within the province of the *modus operandi* of writing, drawing, reading, painting and decoding, "a term that may have implied some form of graphic mark for the Inka" (Cummins 2011, 278). It is equally the site of the condensation of coloniality by

pointing to, through the sensory field it institutes, the indiscernibility between the post- and pre-Columbian, making the one bleed into the other, intimating a dissolve between past and future, and the risk of the gesture involved in the choreographing of a ‘now,’ a present shot through with archaism and futurity, regimes of legibility and visibility in which the meaning of the legible and the visible is itself at stake. “What quilca meant to the Inka is decidedly unclear; however, the word quickly came to be used in the colonial period to refer to most things associated with writing and pictorial drawing” (ibid.).

Quilca, in carrying both the under-determination of aesthesis as well as colonial-conceptual routes of overdetermination binding Andean and Western ontological tracings, thus performs its own meaning. As a concept, it operates heuristically, making opacity palpable and communicable. It intimates utopia, in that, as if through *poiesis* alone, it were possible to negate the law of segregation, of that ‘abstract law’ “that in the West separates the poet from the novelist, the graphic artist from the painter” (Pérez-Oramas 2009, 18).

Chapter 3

3 The Pictogram as Hypericon: The ‘Indiscretion’ of *Grafismo*

3.1 Of Fish, Suns, Moons and Stars: The Polysemy of Graphism

My use of the term ‘hypericon’ as a site of potential proliferation is analogous to that of the hypertext, and differs markedly from W. J. T. Mitchell’s use of the term. In W. J. T. Mitchell’s words, the “hypericon encapsulates an entire episteme, a theory of knowledge” (1994, 49). For him, hypericons are theoretical images, images that image theory, such as the *camera obscura* in Marx’s theory of alienation, the mystic writing pad of Freud’s unconscious, the wax in Descartes’s imaging of the inconstancy of the *res extensa* in relation to the stability of the *res cogitans*, to name just a few. What W. J. T. Mitchell calls hypericon I would call meta-icon, as a reflection on the status of the image as having theoretical, epistemic effects. There is no need to privilege these images gleaned from philosophical discourse and accord them a status of their own, legitimated by the disciplinary aura of philosophy. Every image, metaphor, or icon is the sedimentation of an episteme, or rather, it is a stratum of multiple epistemes. What thus needs to be addressed is how theoretical meta-icons become newly legible through recontextualizations, through new regimes of legibility in tandem with socio-political changes, like those instituted through coloniality. Against W. J. T. Mitchell’s rather static image of hypericon, I propose a trans-disciplinary, dynamic hypericon, as a means to refer to the ability of images to extend beyond the confines of their contours through the very mechanism that defines them as icons (as signs), that is, through resemblance. The notion of the icon-sign presupposes a clear and distinct relationality between the image and its referent. Rather than resemblance being a matter of the correct decoding of what an image ‘stands for,’ hypericonic resemblance is a matter pertaining to pictures

themselves. They are vehicles for visual analogies, for the proliferation of resemblances. But this resemblance is not the coordination with a ‘state of affairs,’ but entails a de-coordination effected by anarchic movements amongst pictures and words that point out visual affinities. The potential of the image’s dissemination through ‘autosuggestion’ – through the intertwining of legibility and visibility – amounts to an immanent destructuring of the tabulations of all kinds of structuralisms predicated on the still life of a stable sign. An icon is always a hypericon: it accumulates the force of going beyond itself, engaging difference – other images – through resemblance, resemblances made manifest through words, prompting a new look onto the ‘old’ image, making it appear strange again through association. An image, in this case the supposedly discrete pictogram of *grafismo*, resembles a host of other images, resemblances – visual associations – that become actual as soon as they have been transcribed into language, as soon as they have been spoken (as in a new metaphor, for instance). Visual analogies are recorded in language, and this regime of legibility allows the ‘discrete’ image to overrun its boundaries, to become a non-sign, part of a dynamic constellation.

What is at stake in the consideration of the pictogram as hypericon is the overdetermination of the image, with the image as nexus of other possible images embroiled in an endless chain of connectivity, legibility and visibility. Perhaps it is not resemblance *per se* that is at issue, but the indexicality of resemblance, in that the image always points out an association with another, related image, carrying a multitude of virtual sensory fields with it. Although the pictogram can be placed within Torres-García’s *grafismo*/graphism, it does not prevent its displacement into other symbolic constellations. In her essay on the work of Torres-García and his legacy in South America, Mari Carmen Ramírez intimates the centrifugal potential of the symbol of constructive universalism, that is, its dynamic “ability to evoke and construe its meaning through a network of other paradigmatic symbols” (Ramírez 1992, 263). The pictogram of the fish for instance resounds with multiple horizons: pagan, Christian, pre-Columbian, or post-Columbian. However, the ‘magic’ of the multifocal hypericon, its propensity to cross contextual-historical borders – its dissemination – is ultimately reterritorialized through a supposed “universal semantic system that ultimately reaffirmed the origins of art in ritual practice” (Ramírez 1992, 263). This ultimate grounding of art

in a regime of legibility that always speaks the same – of *grafismo* always conveying the same signified, i.e., as bespeaking the ‘ritual,’ the ‘cosmic,’ over and over again, as mere pawns in one grand tautological proposition – thereby disregarding the icon/quasi-icon’s graphic constitution, its ‘thick’ sensory reverberations (its a-semiotic aspect, its gestural, bodily indexicality), is to reduce the visual to the status of an idea in the standard, Platonic sense. Given his theoretical allegiance to the spiritual, Torres-García could not but figure this repression of sensibility as an ‘elevation,’ as a *kenosis* toward pure spirituality. This emptying of the sensible intends a sacred *gestus*,¹⁸⁰ a becoming-eidos, and must renounce (or at least downplay) its constitutive materiality. The elision of the opacity of the sensory is what gives the ‘rhetoric of purity’ believability to its proponents, by making it structurally sound, so to speak. *Grafismo* must appear as non-sensory – or only sensory in a secondary, parasitic way – for the rhetorical edifice to maintain its stature of eidetic integrity. That being said, the sheer volume of Torres-García’s writing, as the transcription of an incessant motility of thought, is riddled with contradictions, which makes the purity of the idea slide into the ‘impurity’ of inconstancy. It is as if the thickness of his visual practice secretly found its way into his writing, transcribing, like a seismometer, the polysemy, the indeterminacy of a visual aesthesis demanding thought.

A reading with eyes only for the conceptual and that brings everything back to the level of ritual amounts to a de-politicization of the act of the inversion of the map. The *Inverted Map* is not the emblem of the inauguration of a long-lost ritual space; rather, it is

¹⁸⁰ *Gestus*, a concept from Bertold Brecht’s dramaturgy (cf. Brecht 1964, 198-201), places constructive universalism in a theatrical constellation in conjunction with Benjamin’s notion of aura, as the latter is associated with the authentic, auratic work of art in its originary “ritual function” (Benjamin 2003, 256). The dramatic interface, as thematizing the body, serves as a disturbance to the idealist tenor of the rhetoric of purity of abstraction, with its Neo-Platonic (Christian) ephemeralization of the body, for which its restricted hermeneutic economy has no ‘use vale,’ so to speak. By contrast, Benjamin locates the auratic origin of art in Greek cults (cf. *ibid.*). The term *Gestus*, “the realm of attitudes adopted by the characters” in a performance (Brecht 1964, 198), refers to a complex interplay of voice, facial expression, and physical attitudes. These are expressive of social meanings, and, combined in the performance, constitute overdetermined figures where contradictory, historically mediated significations converge to form an implicit commentary on the contemporary socio-political context (and the convergence of historical strata). In the case of constructive universalism, its *Gestus* could be conceived in terms of the contradiction between the transcendent and the ‘matter’ of the work of art it seeks to contain through a repressive discourse, which could be considered from the perspective of the historical sedimentations of coloniality. The full implications of the theatrical, i.e., as a further deconstruction of constructive universalism, hinted at by Fló’s gestural inflection of *grafismo*, fall outside the scope of the present discussion. For more on the notion of aura, see Chapter 1 (1.2).

the compression of a history of images, of a complex sensory field riddled with tensions, dramatizing the clash between modern cartographical space and the desire to re-sacralise it (cf. supra). As a map, it constitutes a space of designation, but a space that through the very gesture of inversion – its becoming anti-map – effects a vertigo of possible associations that render the image legible in multiple ways, making the image a force field of (historical) tensions and not an ideal, transcendent resolution.



Figure 3.1 Joaquín Torres-García, *Composition*. Oil on canvas, 1932, 71.8 x 50.2 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York [http://www.moma.org/collection_images/resized/409/w500h420/CRI_151409.jpg]

The pictogram of the fish is a case in point. Even within the hierarchy of symbols of the AAC and the TTG, the status of the fish-pictogram was not altogether stable, and perhaps indicates the movement's anxiety concerning the body and the status of the sensory. The fish occupied a rather ambiguous space within Torres-García's cosmology, as it is the ideogram where the sensory, the instinctual-intuitive, and the rational geometric principle meet – in a way, it acts as the space of contention between figuration and abstraction (Figure 3.1). It is a figure for hypericonicity in its own right since it is the

pictogram constructive universalism is so ill at ease with. It is an avatar for that which escapes conceptual grasp within constructive universalism's system, namely the realm of nature, of embodiment, of matter.

Within constructive universalism, the fish was usually associated with the lower parts of the human body, the locus of the instincts, the drives, and fertility, as well as with the natural world at large. This is in keeping with the meaning it holds in many Western and non-Western societies alike, where the fish is “in general, a symbol of fertility and procreation originally associated with the Mother-Goddess,” and the womb, while also being “one of the elements of the sacramental meal in several cults in antiquity” (Hall 1994, 24).¹⁸¹ However, the notion of instinct was not incompatible with the notion of reason. To the contrary, Torres-García conceived of *logos*, and more specifically geometric rationality, in terms that are decidedly vitalistic, almost expressionistic. Geometry, as the expression of authentic, primordial man, was not just the pure Apollonian aspect of expression – the moderating of the unrestrained artistic-destructive impulse – but was already the negotiation with the Dionysian.¹⁸² For Torres-García, geometric abstraction was the vehicle for the exercise of the unconscious desire of man to create meaning through the construction of spatial relations, as manifested in patterning, decoration, and schematizations. In short, anything that was non-figurative, that is to say, anything not too anecdotal, descriptive or narrative, was taken as proof of the primordial purity of geometric thought, which degenerated into naturalism and illusionism – a type of figuration which he usually identified with the name ‘literary’ – over the course of history.

The equivocal distinction – ultimately unintelligible since the terms turn out to be indistinguishable – between ‘putting in order’ and ‘creating an order,’ between a figuration subject to the demands of a non-instrumental geometry (constructive universalism) and geometry as underlabourer to a figurative regime of visibility (the

¹⁸¹ For a succinct overview of the symbolism of the fish, ranging from the lower Egyptian, Sumerian associations, to Greco-Roman and over to Chinese symbolism, see James Hall's *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art* (1996), 24-25.

¹⁸² For a simplified sketch of the struggle between the Apollonian and the Dionysian as the central operative concepts within Nietzsche's art philosophy, see Chapter 1 (1.1).

decadence that started with the Renaissance), was re-mapped by Torres-García onto an opposition between a humane and anti-humanist type of abstraction. The one was deemed legitimate, insofar as it gave expression to the universal ‘human’ aspect without reverting to the anecdotal and overly particular, whereas the illegitimate, purely figurative, realist, ‘literary’ and overly sensuous-particular variety – even though geometry might be traceable through the application of perspective – was deemed an unhealthy deviation from man’s authentic will to abstraction, as an infringement of the principle of universality, as individualistic-materialistic. Accordingly, the system of constructive universalism always allowed for a certain amount of figuration, as the latter resounded with the movement’s underlying humanism. The point was to find the equilibrium between the figurative and the abstract, with the proviso that figuration must always submit to the dictates of structure: the pictogram must ‘weave itself’ into the tectonic grid, it must disappear for the sake of the ‘common good’ of the plastic whole – and the implication would seem to be that the viewer who does not see this is not fit for the utopia of the New Constructive South. Torres-García deemed the total absence of the figurative as lacking in humanity. He was adverse to what he conceived as the anti-human rigour of Neo-Plasticism and Elementarism in particular. This also explains why, contrary to the demand of Theo van Doesburg, Torres-García never absolutely repudiated surrealism, since he recognized in the movement a genuine concern with overcoming the reification of man.¹⁸³ Furthermore, constructive universalism always kept a link with nature, with the thickness of visual reality, at play within its work: Torres-García’s conception of art “encompassed rational structure, emotion or intuition and symbolic references to the world of nature. What he sought was a broad humanism in a contemporary expressive form” (Rowell 1985, 13). During his stay in Paris in the twenties and early thirties, Torres-García had already discovered the force of the concept of ‘nature,’ its uncanny ability to motivate avant-garde movements, of animating hatreds, friendships, sectarian splits, excommunications – a term of intense affective attachment

¹⁸³ For a more detailed account on Torres-García’s tortuous relationship with geometric abstraction on the one hand, and his fascination with surrealism – anathema for anyone declaring allegiance with the work of Mondriaan and Van Doesburg – see Nicolette Gast’s essay “Torres-García in Paris” in Kattouw 1991, 70-102. Gast describes Torres-García’s ill-fated attempt at creating a more inclusive group of artists in *Cercle et Carré* as indicative of his desire for reconciling abstraction with (a modicum of) figuration. He saw it as a move towards a more inclusive, humanist abstraction.

and interestedness, in short, the site of dogma. In a 1929 letter in response to Torres-García's proposal for establishing a broad, non-doctrinal group of abstractionists in *Cercle et Carré*, Jean Hélion, who was working in the paradigm of geometric abstraction at that time, reveals the marginality of the Uruguayan's more 'ecumenical' position, while highlighting the contested status of "natural appearances":

The last time we met you spoke to me about your idea of founding a dual group placed under the sign of constructivism. I told you that I thought more reflection was needed as it seemed to me that as then conceived, the group included mutually-exclusive tendencies: on the one side the absolute conviction that nature must not 'formally' participate in the structure of the work of art (Van Doesburg, Mondrian, Pevsner, etc., and myself); and on the other painters such as yourself who are convinced that pure constructive art is incomplete. You objected saying that we should form a broadly based group. I admire your art and I have had the occasion to prove it but I do not believe that your will to integrate natural appearances into your work is a way toward truth (qtd. in Rowell 1985, 13).

However, in order to placate the demands of primordial geometric thought, Torres-García kept the evocation of "natural appearances" equivocal: 'nature' was only to be 'pointed to' through a schematic, minimal form of referentiality, namely, through the system of *grafismo* posited as immune to the decadence of mimesis. As pointed out in previously, this was a distinction constructive universalism was obsessed with disambiguating since it considered it fundamental to its own praxis, but which proved impossible to disentangle in the end. The endless homology of abstract/figurative, pre-colonial/post-colonial, universal/particular, etc., and the clear boundaries between the distinctions is what constructive universalism was never able to make transparent to itself, but not for lack of trying. In fact, the theoretical labour dedicated to this issue can be read as an admission that all are fundamentally confused and inconstant, intuiting that abstraction and figuration are relational, and not absolutes. It is precisely the anxiety of keeping the schematic immune to resemblance, and the intuition that the distinction between deixis and mimesis is not as clear-cut as constructive universalism would like it, are what prompt the endless series of theoretical reformulations intent on 'finally' settling the polemos between abstraction and figuration, while paradoxically only drawing out this struggle. To the desire for absolute clarity, the desire of separating what cannot be separated – since abstraction is always a function of figuration, and vice versa – of the

painstaking theoretical formulations and retractions, corresponds the paintings' free oscillation between both, especially Torres-García's later grid-wall paintings, which, as I will argue, precisely revel in their double status as both figurative – as a naturalistic rendition of an Inca wall – and abstract – as the exploration of the compositional possibilities of the grid, as both autonomous and heteronomous, cosmic and vulgar, at the same time.¹⁸⁴

Again, the figure of the fish – as cypher of 'nature' in the system of *grafismo* – brings out an equivocation as it oscillates between the demand of autonomy posed by the work of art and the (minimal) referentiality to the objective world it had to entertain in order to make its cosmic dimensions tangible, with the fish functioning as index of 'rituality.' Made visible the way Torres-García theorized his work, that is, as a plastic microcosm, one can see the canvas as accommodating the fish-schema within the visual surface according to the compositional possibility granted by the grid, i.e., following the sizing of the cells, and the interrelation with the other cells and pictograms.



Figure 3.2 *Invitation to the 100th Exhibition of El Taller Torres-García*, Montevideo, 1956. Photo: George Holmes. [Ramírez 1991, 171].

¹⁸⁴ For more on the grid-work, see the Conclusion.

The fish eventually came to function as the logo of the Taller Torres-García (Figure 3.2), as it seemed to chime with constructive universalism's self-fashioning as the synthesizing agent between what it considered the rigid rationalism of Neo-Plasticism and Concretism – extremist abstraction – and the excessive valorization of the instinctual in doctrinal Surrealism – extremist figuration. The fish acts as the symbol for this mediating, interstitial position drawn from the repository of *grafismo*. Because it foregrounded this ambition for reconciliation, the movement faced a constant, self-imposed struggle – at least as rehearsed in its writings and manifestoes – between figuration and abstraction, and the continual need it felt to theoretically ground, rearticulate and legitimate its negotiation between the two forces that it set up as the two terms of its own fundamental antinomy. Constructive universalism, in positing itself as the ‘middle term,’ sought to institute a new realism, an authentic, universalist, planar and ideally two-dimensional anti-‘literary’ realism governed by the principles of sacred geometry.

Its theoretical framework presented itself as capable of accommodating both the instinct and intellect, both nature – however minimally conceived – and structure, a synthesis that would place its praxis on a higher, universal level, as opposed to what Torres-García conceived as Surrealism's overemphasis on the individual psyche. In “The Abstract Rule,” Torres-García stages the conflict between the particular and the universal as the never-ending struggle constitutive of constructive universalism itself. It is presented as the defining feature of a “new realism” locked in combat with the eternal seduction of figuration (that is, of *too much* figuration, too much of the particular, the individual), to form an art where

everything will be concrete, true measure, true color, true form – the apparent swept away so that everything is represented just as it is. A new realism, in tune with our period. Each artist will have to fight – within himself – the great continuous battle between Universal man and the individual. The subjective having been swept away, individual artists no longer exist, only ART (Torres-García 1992, 170).

However, it is in statements such as these that the self-contradictory nature of constructive universalism as theory becomes palpable. The co-primordial status of instinct and *ratio*, with constructive universalism as the coarticulation of reason and

instinct via the directly expressive means of geometry, with geometry as the medium for a ‘vitalist logos’ working in harmony with a repertoire of abstract, symbolic pictograms, is here pushed aside in the name of the all-encompassing ‘universal.’ The latter presupposes a more rigid, dogmatic conception of abstraction whose desire is not so much the reconciliation as the ‘sweeping away’ of ‘the apparent,’ the sensory, the particular in the name of universal ‘Art.’

All this merely to point out that what the theory of *grafismo* leaves out, by paradoxically circumscribing it in such a doctrinal way, is the actual moment of presentation of the work to the eye, the sensory field that *grafismo* immediately transcribes into a semantic field, with its fixed meanings, its hierarchy of symbols, the tabulation, classification and inventory of icons and corresponding signifieds. In the *Inverted Map*, the mystery of sight is fully at play. Not only does the map – as a picture of space, an image of the spacing engendering a *here* – choreograph the gesture of pointing, with the cross as the trace of the index finger having pointed out the place (at “S 34° 41’ W 56° 9,’” as we are reminded). The map also points out that the pictograms, as well as the drawing as a whole, is not comprised of signs that merely await their correct placement within the system of *grafismo*. Rather, the force of this map, of this anti-map, precisely resides in its work of displacement, a displacement that opens up a field of sight through associations that produce resemblances and carry the image outside of its frame. This brings us back to the basic insight that these pictograms, rather than merely arbitrary signs within a law-governed system, are icons, around which resemblances cluster, effecting often contradictory regimes of legibility and visibility no theory can fully account for. The point is not so much that the icon/quasi-icon-pictogram resembles a referent that points outside the image to a particular object in the world. To read the image this way would indeed amount to a re-naturalization of abstraction, as a way to ground it in a subterranean *istoria*¹⁸⁵ – which would be an overly “ingenious attempt”

¹⁸⁵ In *Della pittura* (1435), the first treatise on perspective in relation to the setting forth of the task of art as the faithful, ‘correct,’ rendering of the world – art as correspondence – Leon Battista Alberti already signals the intimate relation between dramatic representation and mathematical principles, making the image the space for a lifelikeness that depends on geometric harmony and proportion, with perspective as the means through which this (formal) semblance of life can be instantiated. *Istoria*, broadly conceived of as narrativity and life-like dramatization, is thus posited as indissociable from a certain mathematical rigour of

(Fló 1992, 32) at decoding indeed, of bringing everything back to the reassuring order of language and narrative. Rather, to these icons, and both *Inverted Maps* as a whole for that matter, pertains the power of the virtual: the pictograms resemble other images, to which other regimes of legibility are attached, which in turn give rise to new visual analogies: it gives to view the hybrid as movement, not as static identity. The *Inverted Map* is a hypericon, a condensation of a multiplicity of other images, and as such, it is a layering of history, a complex, multifocal image of coloniality.¹⁸⁶ Together with its accompanying text, “The School of the South,” it makes the impossible, utopian, amnesiac claim, posing a counterfactual as if it had truth value – in the mode of the future anterior, the mode of performativity so characteristic of the genre of the manifesto, or rather, the historic future present, a position from which past, present and future have become indiscernible – that “the epoch of colonialism and importation is over” (Torres-García 1992, 55).

The theoretical formulations are blind to historical overdetermination and, through the replication of the discourse of universality, gloss over the politics of the aesthetic at stake as it concerns the inscription of South America into the West’s scriptural-pictorial epistemological economy. In fact, the condition of possibility of the claim to universality is the repression of the eternal, immutable signified that takes on various formal modulations throughout the ages and across cultures. Even if there are

composition, in which geometry is instrumental in the organization of a dramatic field. For Torres-García, this constitutes the ‘minor tradition’ of the Renaissance, in which geometry is disciplined in the ‘service of representation.’ For more on the concept of istoria and perspective, see, amongst many others, Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994); James Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) and Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

¹⁸⁶ In its condensation, inversion, layering and potential to proliferate through infinite visual-verbal associations – giving rise to an unstoppable excess of images and discourses ‘locked’ inside the map awaiting interpretation – the *Inverted Map* brings to mind Sigmund Freud’s notion of dream-work, *Traumarbeit* (cf. Freud 1999). It would be interesting to ‘chart’ the map as a topology of the (Freudian) unconscious, of a mapping of unintended ‘visual slips,’ which, by the way, is precisely what I am hinting by reading the map as a slippage into the terrain of *mestizaje*, an area Torres-García foreclosed in his theory but could not stop imagining in his visual praxis (invoking Guamán Poma and Pachacuti Yamqui’s drawings, as I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3, 3.2). Furthermore, it would be fascinating to work out the map as an Incaic displacement of the notion and topology of the unconscious itself, as a counter-hegemonic imaging of the canonical unconscious, now riddled with the memory traces of coloniality – to re-route Vienna via Cusco (and back).

local, spatiotemporal discrepancies between pictograms, these are merely taken as proof – as the illustration, the example – of the universal, thus enclosing signification within a tautological circle. Torres-García disallows historicity from entering (and ‘soiling’) the picture he constructs with his theory. Historical overdetermination is what constructive universalism as theoretical discourse represses, and cannot ‘see’ in its own praxis since it threatens to ‘lower’ the universal into a dizzying relay of meanings, of a-signification through over-coding, of the particular regimes of legibility/visibility it invokes in the construction - which it figures as ‘abstraction’ in the sense of a ‘stripping down’ - of its edifice. Such an insight would force constructive universalism to reckon with the disparate non-western modes of understanding that it appropriates on the canvas. It is the eclectic syncretism that is the *modus operandi* of Torres-García’s art work that the discourse of constructive universalism must not see if it is to uphold its claim to universality on the level of the *modus significandi*. A reckoning with the ‘anarchy’ of its *modus operandi* might topple the architectonics of transparency of the *modus significandi* it projects for itself. ‘Constructive universalism’ is thus the name of a paradox, of a permanent tension between construction as accretion (the mode of ‘deduction’ so to speak), and the counter-force of the universal as a movement from the particular to the universal (the mode of ‘induction’ so to speak). It tries to resolve this paradox through an investment in the esoteric notion of ‘intellectual intuition,’ as the moment where production and reception of meaning would be self-identical, but which in fact amounts to the ‘forgetting’ of materiality altogether.¹⁸⁷ As I will argue in greater detail in Chapter 3.2, this self-identity comprises the core of Torres-García’s utopian dream of an unmediated return to the ‘pre-Columbian,’ which at the same time constitutes its most ideological operation in its utter disavowal of materiality. In fact, what makes possible the story of abstraction as the purification and shedding of socio-historically,

¹⁸⁷ This is a ‘solution’ in line with the demands of the ‘rhetoric of purity,’ and manifestly not with the demands posed by the work of art. To recall Mark A. Cheetham’s characterization of the central contradiction that defines abstraction, the notion of intellectual intuition tries to grapple with the “paradox of an absolute that must appear in what is by definition a tainted, material form” (1991, 107). It is a strategy that makes perfect sense in the restricted economy of constructive universalism’s discourse, but read against the visual works, the rift between legibility and visibility becomes all the more apparent. For more details on the indispensable notion of the ‘rhetoric of purity’ as a way to understand the enigma of a discourse that negates its own material praxis, see Chapter 1 (1.1 in particular).

ideologically inflected shapes into images that hold a (cryptic, esoteric) universal signified is the moment of accretion, the moment of construction proper prior to its ‘thinning’ into a universal essence. What is never admitted by Torres-García, nor by any scholarly work on his use of his ‘symbols’ for that matter, is the irreducibility of the prior moment of accretion, of the meaning of ‘construction’ itself as not referring to signification, but as an index of *poiesis*. The pictograms are accretions of disparate regimes of visibility - viz. they are hypericons - and are thus the work of a construction, of a gathering, of a montage/collage of images. This montage/collage is then reframed - inverted - along the narrative plot - the familiar topos - of abstraction as process, that is, as the emptying out of the corporeal into a supersensible essence. This way, it makes itself legible under the sign of ‘universality.’ As a side note, I take Theo van Doesburg’s pedagogy of abstraction, figured in his *Ästhetische Transfiguration eines Gegenstandes* from the 1925 publication *Grundbegriffe der neuen gestaltenden Kunst*, as paradigmatic of the dominant topos of abstraction as process, a topos that informs constructive universalism as a discursive formation, as well as skewing almost all discussions of Torres-García’s work. In anticipation of my discussion of ‘ethnographic abstraction,’ I can state for the moment that the presentation of the abstract primitive as if he were the effect of abstraction as process misses the operation that makes the ‘primitive’ legible in this way. This is precisely how Torres-García presents his ‘Abstract Man’ to the world, and this conceptualization is echoed in all of the readings that try to make sense of the meaning of this primordial primitive to which the artist desires to return to. More specifically, Torres-García’s operation consists of tracing visual analogies through collage and the juxtaposition of photographic documentation and sketches (Figure 8.6 and 8.7). This improvisational making is never brought into the discussion of the constructive element of ‘constructive universalism,’ while I deem it essential to an understanding of construction as gesture rather than object of meditation, an object for semiotics to ‘account for.’ Only by taking construction in its more literal, materialistic sense - and thus of Torres-García’s theoretical pronouncements that never speak a word of material condition of possibility, or frame them as dispensable - can we start to gauge the artifice that underlies the dogma of dematerialized essences constructive universalism

preserves at all costs - to the point where it negates itself - and art - as a practice of making.¹⁸⁸

Incidentally, it is of utmost importance to note that with ‘mode of production,’ I do not merely refer to the moment of *poiesis* of the artist-producer in his/her working over of the material, but equally to the aesthetic work of the work of art, namely, to its production of an affective zone, of a “sensory field” to use Lyotard’s phrase (cf. Lyotard 2011).¹⁸⁹ The latter is a way of broaching the bodily effects, the non-discursive, embodied sort of knowledge that materiality holds out to the viewer. In short, it is a way of raising the question of *aisthesis* in its most basic - ‘base’ - form.¹⁹⁰ In addition, the ‘mode of production’ - as *poiesis* and *aisthesis* - loops back into the *modus significandi*, in that it disrupts any attempt at clear and distinct conceptual articulation.

In fact, Torres-García’s maps are reflections on the entanglement of the *modus significandi* with the *modus operandi*, in that through the operation of hybridization – of instilling contradictory regimes of visibility and legibility onto the surface of the same drawing – the map becomes an anti-map. The gesture of inversion cuts short the legibility of the map as an imagetext that gives direction. Instead, it is an emblem of re-thinking one’s place, forcing the viewer to take up a position, to take sides. The map produces a space, a re-orientation of the South as opposed to the North (and West, and East, for that matter), the fantasy of the autarchy of the South, which is now North, the privileged point of the compass. However, the dream of autonomy and cultural self-definition is immediately compromised: the parody of the map’s function as orientational device through inversion, as if this gesture alone were sufficient to ‘prove’ independence, is

¹⁸⁸ I will explore the implications of the disavowal of the narrative ‘infra-structure’ in Theo van Doesburg’s pedagogy of abstraction in relation to Torres-García’s own negation of the means of production in Chapter 4 (4.3.).

¹⁸⁹ In chapter 2 (2.3 and 2.4), I give a fuller account of how I use the notion of “sensory field” – as thematizing the aesthetic demand of the visual to thought – as opposed to what I name the ‘logical field’ as constituted by the theoretical discourse of constructive universalism.

¹⁹⁰ It constitutes, in other words, a way to approach the work of art in terms of its ‘spirit,’ as understood by Adorno (1997), that is, as the experience of dislocation concomitant with the indeterminacy of the aesthetic that demands thought to think through this inscrutability, to give it shape in words. For more on Adorno’s notion of the spirit of the work of art, see Chapter 1 (1.3). For an exploration of Adorno’s notion of constellation, which he borrowed and re-signified from Walter Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1977), see the Introduction as well as Chapter 4 (4.2).

revoked through graphism. The latter animates an irrepressible branching out of the icon in visual resemblances that carry with them historical sediments of legibility, a history of coloniality without which the act of inversion would be unintelligible, and be devoid of any critical potential whatsoever. Taken together, the two versions of the *Inverted Map* present a condensation of Western map-making and colonialism, while at the same time holding on to elements of Inca pictography, the traces of an indelible graphic memory. As hypericon, the map conjures up cartographies from the past, and the role of the South, the New World, in the production of a world picture and a global geography. The graphisms of the cross, the galleon, the moon, the stars and the fish in the 1944 *Inverted Map* (Figure 1.6) and the compass, the moon and sun, as well as the hand-drawn lines of geometric projection in the 1936 version (Figure 1.3), together with the canonical shape of South America and manuscripted glottography and numbers in both maps point to the history of the reorientation of the world from the perspective of the hegemonic centre, Western Europe, as well as the counter-force of Amerindian memory traces, making the map a space where hybridity is enacted in its full contradictory tensions.

Jennifer A. Jolly highlights the ambiguity – the potential for self-de-structuration of *grafismo* as the systemic pictorial repertoire for the expression of metaphysical signifieds – of the hypericons/graphisms of sun, moon, fish and galleon, making the latter visible as “a ship arriving in Montevideo” (Figure 1.5).

On the one hand, they are closely related to imagery of navigation and discovery, and even evoke earlier maps. Within the larger corpus of Torres-García’s works, the sun, moon and stars are used as universal symbols evoking larger symbols and numerous belief systems; the ship suggests commerce, transatlantic travel, histories of exploration, and even his own life’s voyage and return to Montevideo; while the fish represents the material realm of things (often standing for the animal kingdom, alongside plant and mineral imagery) ... The explicit reference to commerce and trade drives home his strategy of inversion: now the world will sail – and look – *up* to Uruguay (Jolly 2011, 201; italics in original).

The word ‘evocation’ is critical here. The graphisms do not signify; they evoke, conjure up a series of visual resemblances, of other images that make this map newly visible, and newly legible as part of a cartographic tradition. The ‘earlier map’ Torres-García’s image brings to the interpreter’s mind is Diego Gutiérrez’s, *Americae sive quartae orbis nova et*

exactissima description, originally printed in 1562. Karl Offen and Jordana Dym view this map as paradigmatic of “the invention of the Western Hemisphere as ‘America’ or ‘the Americas.’” (Offen and Dym 2011, 4). Invoking the work of historian John Herbert, they suggest that “Spain printed this fantastic map to show to European powers the broad extent of its claims” and “distinguish the lands of Spain from those of Portugal in the New World” (ibid.). Through visual analogy, a new discourse is evoked, that of the territorial struggles between Spain and Portugal, their claims to property for the sake of mercantile expansion and conversion. All of a sudden, the *Inverted Map* takes on a darker side, not so much evoking ‘commerce, transatlantic travel, histories of exploration’ – the sunny, adventurous, almost touristy fiction of (late) Renaissance mapping – but extortion, transatlantic invasions, histories of exploitation – the dark side of coloniality. The constellation of ship, moon, stars and sun is overdeterminate; it leads to associations that are in principle boundless, directionless, unmappable. In spite of its utopian intent, the *Inverted Map* uncovers, perhaps by merely being a map, or at least the simulation of one, a violence that made the world, as the world we know it now, possible. Torres-García’s ‘own life’s voyage and return to Montevideo,’ back from the hegemonic centre, in 1934, was the beginning of a new process of importation and extraction, this time cultural. The knowledge he had accumulated from primitivism, from visiting ethnographic museums, by reading works on archaeology and pre-contact civilizations in the archives of cosmopolitan libraries – the spoils of coloniality – he now imports back to Montevideo, with the intent of curing the native, provincialist criollo intellectuals and artists of their inclination of copying ‘imported models’ of the worst kind, that is, decadent, figurative models. Upon his homecoming a new evangelization and extraction will begin. By importing the Inca into Montevideo – since Uruguay had no substantial vestiges from pre-Columbian times – he hopes to further extract its tectonic, abstract essence and convert the South into his image of primordial ‘Abstract Man.’



Figure 3.3 Diego Gutiérrez, *Americae sive quartae orbis nova et exactissima descriptio* [New and exact map of Americas, or quarter of the world], Antwerp, 1562, originally printed on six sheets, 83 x 86 cm. Library of Congress, American Memory website. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/map_image.pl?data=/home/www/data/gmd/gmd3/g3290/g3290/ct000342.jp2&x=5246&y=5954&res=5&width=326&height=372&lastres=5&jpegLevel=80].

The Quecha name for the Inca realm, *Tawantinsuyu*, which can be transliterated as either “the four quarters of the world,” “the four regions united among themselves” (Paternosto 1996, 10), or “four parts together” (Dean 2007, 507) evokes the quadripartite division of space along the axes of a cross. The origin – in both its mathematical as well as cosmological sense – of the quartering of the territory was centred in Cusco, as the point where the vertical and horizontal axes meet, dividing the territory into four distinct parts: “To the north was the Chinchaysuyo, to the east the Antisuyo, to the south the

Qollasuyo, and to the west the Kontisuyo” (ibid.). The name ‘Cusco’ itself had a profound cosmological meaning as

the fundamental cell of the Inca cosmos and culture: it had the character of the omphalos, ‘the navel of the world,’ a space of mythic origin that acquired a sacred significance, since the places from which the city was seen for the first or last time were made into shrines (Paternosto 1996, 55).

This gridding of space, in which territorial organization served as the principle for the distribution of social status and hierarchy, giving each section its distinct ‘flavour,’ was compatible with the transcendent. In the words of chronicler Sarmiento de Gamboa, Cusco expressed the basic sense “to occupy a space in a magical way” (qtd. in Paternosto 1996, 10). The mapping of Cusco and Tawantinsuyu in general obeyed the principles of a sacred geometry, in which relations of space corresponded with the transcendent, a principle Torres-García held as foundational to his own philosophy of art. Time, as the rhythmic movement through space as encoded within the recurrence of ritual, was equally part of a sacred configuration, of divine geometry permeating Inca habitus, or rather, of the present image of Inca ‘everyday cosmology’ constructed through a reimagining of ruins and fragments. Particular objects, habitations, elements of the landscape, sites, topographical idiosyncrasies and striking rock outcrops were deemed sacred and called *huacas*. These were organized along imaginary lines – the *ceques* – all converging in the religious center of Cusco, the Temple of the Sun, *Coricancha*. Religious rites took place according to the regularity of a religious calendar, which set forth the time in which *huacas* were to be worshipped along the ceremonial routes of pilgrimage outlined by the *ceque* system (cf. Suarez and George 2011, 123-148). Inca origin myths are myths of displacement, of migration, of the following of a route to its endpoint, Cusco, as the origin of a second beginning. (cf. Suarez and George 2011, 137ff; Stone-Miller 2002, 182).¹⁹¹ The Inca conception of ‘Cusco’ as axis mundi reverberates

¹⁹¹ The Inca claimed to be direct descendants of the sun god, Inti, instructed by the creator god Viracocha to find a suitable place for settlement and civilize the world. One version has it that travelling from the Island of the Sun in Lake Titicaca, the children of Inti finally stopped in Cuzco, “tested the soil with the bar [i.e., a bar of gold that would sink into the ground thereby signifying that they had arrived home] and found it suitable. Upon the bar’s sinking, they knew they had arrived at their chosen land and set about building the royal residence and the Temple of the Sun” (Suarez and George 2011, 138).

with medieval Christian cosmography – or rather, both conceptual models are symptomatic of what Mignolo dubs the “omphalos syndrome” (1995, 227) – that posited Jerusalem as the navel of the universe, a conceptual representational model of sacred space that would gradually be eclipsed by the cartographic model of a world without radiating center – a world no longer (exclusively) organized around a centripetal conceptual-symbolic, religious center with inherent meaning (the site of Christ’s suffering, death and rebirth) – but instead grounded in a differential positional model of coordination resulting in an ‘objective’ model of the globe.¹⁹²

This opens up another interpretative possibility owing to the hypericon aspect of the overdetermined cross-graphism. The sign of the cross on Torres-García’s *Inverted Map*, the simple, abstract ‘plus’ sign with arms of equal length, is a Greek cross. As a symbol associated with early Christianity, it conforms to Torres-García’s intransigent atavism that validates the most originary as the most authentic, with the locus of the ‘pure’ beginning as the only proper place from which a true renaissance can take root (cf. Fló 1992). The cross, marking the point of origin of the new ‘School of the South’ of Andean, tectonic abstraction, can be read as simultaneously an eminently Christian as well as Andean symbol. The fish-graphism of the *Inverted Map* (Figure 1.6) as well as the TTG logo (Figure 3.2) can be placed within this same ‘mestizaje’ of visual constellations, as it not so much “represents the material realm of things (often standing for the animal kingdom, alongside plant and mineral imagery)” (Jolly, 2001) as *grafismo* would have it, but as symptomatic of Torres-García’s openly messianic tone, his fusing of pedagogy and profession of faith, with art figuring as means of redemption and spiritual rebirth (cf. Fló 1992).

¹⁹² In *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995), Walter Mignolo stresses the point that although Western cartography in principle no longer organized itself around a conceptual-symbolic and religious ‘ethnic centre’ such as Jerusalem around which the cosmos revolved, it nonetheless replicated the idea of the centre in terms of socio-economic domination, through the distinction of the colonial empire and its dependent periphery. This division and centralization of power in the hegemonic centre and colonial ‘outposts’ was precisely predicated on the ‘objective’ validity of the new science of geography, as a technology of coloniality, which produced the image of a de-centred, objective world view as a way to cover up deep socio-economic antagonisms.

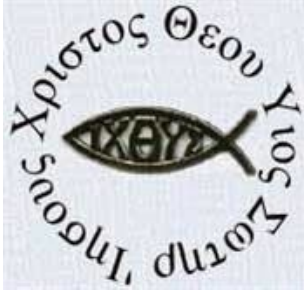


Figure 3.4 Ichthys symbol. [<http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Ichthys.svg>]

Underscoring the Christian-messianic association is the presence of the fish-graphism. Together, the fish and cross become visible as an Early Christian pictorial constellation, further disorienting an apparently avant-garde gesture and imbuing it with increasing historical density, making this seemingly naïve map even more opaque. Together with the graphism of the ship, it further enhances the association with colonial expansion and evangelization. The TTG logo resembles the Ichthys symbol (Figure 3.4), the Ichthys being “the acrostic made of the Greek word for fish (ΙΧΘΥΣ), each letter of which represents a word in the divine name: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior” symbolizing “Christ as the fish, and allud[ing] to both baptism and Eucharist” (Jensen 2000, 50-51). Gonzalo Fonseca, a former student at the Taller Torres-García painted his own *Map of South America*, with the TTG-fish/Ichthys as *pars pro toto* for Uruguay, intimating the utopia of the coming reign of constructive universalism (Figure 3.5).

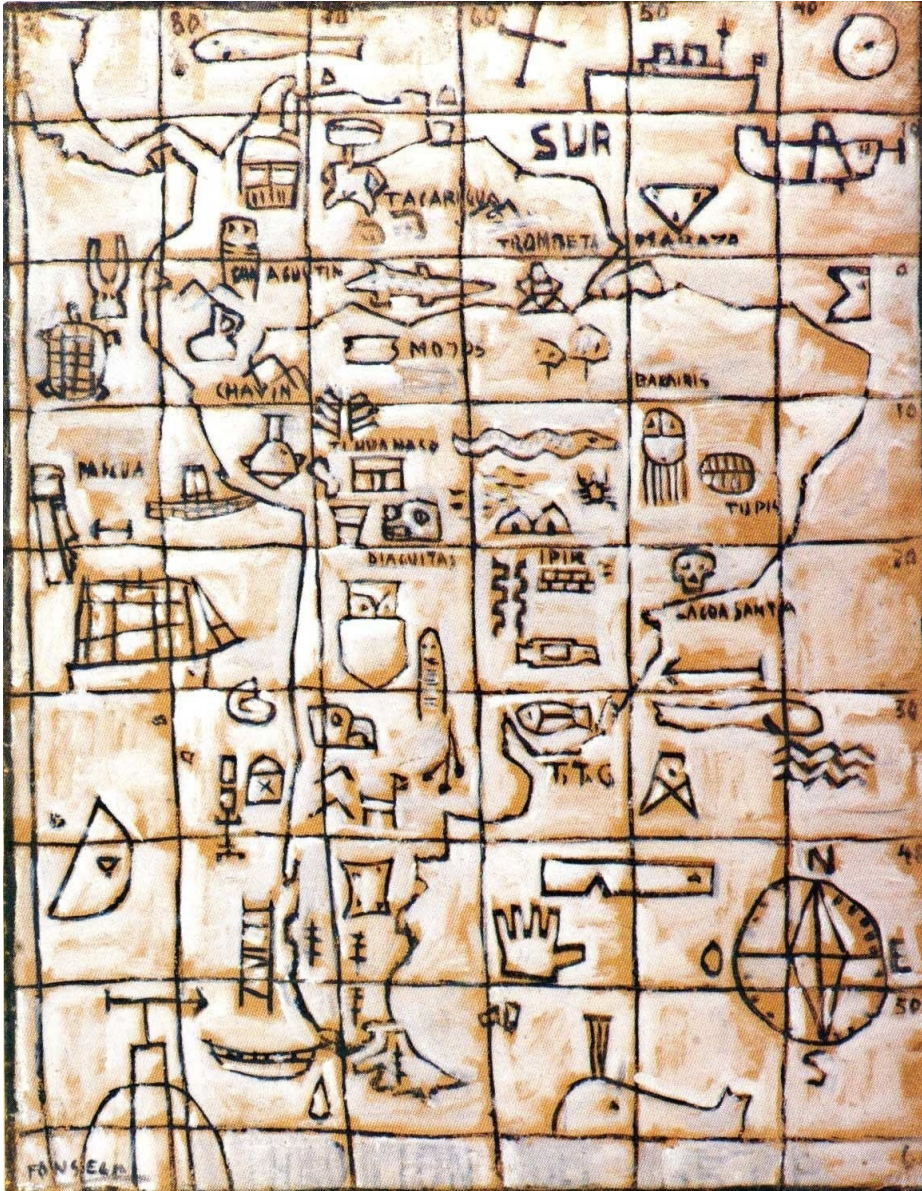


Figure 3.5 Gonzalo Fonseca, *Mapa de America del sur*, 1950. Oil on cardboard, 110.3 x 88 cm. Collection of Roberto Sapriza, Montevideo. [César Paternosto and Piet Coessens, eds., *Abstraction: the Amerindian paradigm* (Brussels: Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux Arts de Bruxelles, 2001), 96].

3.2 “The School of the South” and the Inversion of Maps: Hypericon, Imagetext and Emblematics

Thus far, I have considered the map outside of its original textual embedding. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to an ‘emblematic’ exploration of the two versions of the *Inverted Map* in relation to the text, the manifesto “The School of the South,” as its original discursive ‘home.’ With ‘emblematics’ I refer to a reading that emphasizes the composite nature of the imagetext, in which logical fields and sensory fields enter in a movement of contradiction. Though clearly invoking the popular genre of the emblem book, a popularity that reached its heights from the sixteenth until well into the eighteenth century in Europe, I am invoking the emblematic as a way of broaching the “question of how visual figures relate to verbal ones,” and how “forms of *pictura* and *scriptura* gloss one another” (Whitman 2000, 276). Emblematics addresses the tension between word and image, the way in which, in the genre of the emblem book, “the picture does not merely ‘illustrate’ the text and vice versa; rather, each [*pictura* and *scriptura*] elucidates and at times qualifies the other. An image with an inherited meaning may be significantly realigned by its new textual setting” (ibid., 276-277). The emblem suggests the interminable interaction between word and image, their ever-shifting, dialogical permutations. It is a way to gauge how words and image (de-)territorialize one another, how words deal with the “polysemy of the image” by fixing the anarchic flow of visual analogies through conceptual subsumption, through anchorage (Barthes 1997, 37), and, conversely, the ways in which resemblances, once registered in language, may open up the image to new legibilities and unruly visual analogies, the movement of de-anchoring, of de-territorialisation.

The initial version of the *Inverted Map* was published in the first issue of *Círculo y Cuadrado* (1936; Figure 1.3) upon Joaquín Torres-García’s return to his native Montevideo as a means to announce his intent to found a new art in synch with South America’s deepest cultural tradition. The map inaugurated the return of constructive universalism to its supposedly authentic home: South America as the birthplace of true tectonic abstraction, with constructive universalism marking the beginning of its

renaissance. Torres-García embarked on a ‘civilizing mission’ of his own, tirelessly lecturing and teaching, trying to force his public – still steeped in the ‘decadence’ of colonial, figurative styles – into remembering a pre-Columbian past so as to attain cultural independence, and become a model hemisphere instead of a faux Europe (cf. Paternosto 1996, 217). The fruits of his pedagogical labour were published in 1944 in the tome of lectures, 149 in total, gathered in the massive *Universalismo Constructivo: Contribución a la unificación del arte y la cultura de América*, a title clearly indicating the Pan-(South-)American scope of his project. Lesson 30, a transcript of the lecture “The School of the South” originally delivered in Montevideo 1935 (cf. Ramírez 1992, 53), is where the second, more schematized version of his first map appears (Figure 1.6).

Sebastián Lopez captures Torres-García’s perception of his home country quite nicely, and inadvertently duplicates the artist’s own belief that because Uruguay did not have any monumental remains or substantial traces dating back to pre-Columbian times this meant that it had no tradition at all.

Uruguay does not have any indigenous culture that has left evidence of itself in visual works such as those of the Incas or the Mayans; its group of aborigines (Charruas, Minoanos, and Guaranies) were nomadic groups who had either been absorbed by the Creole culture or had been massacred by European immigrants. The Uruguayan bourgeoisie who preferred to think of their country as the ‘Switzerland of Latin America’ rather than as ‘the New Cuzco,’ attempted to define themselves as distinct from rather than similar to the other countries of Latin America (Lopez 1991, 130-31).

This equation with the pre-Columbian and an ‘authentic’ indigenous, ‘deep’ tradition as opposed to the colonial, ‘imported’ cultural models that only resulted in a ‘superficial’ tradition is highly problematic. As Torres-García suggests in one telling passage, it is the very idea of deep historical strata as comprising an ‘authentic’ tradition, the image of an original culture with ‘deep’ roots is what he imported from Europe – taking the Old World as the example of legitimate tradition.

All the peoples of the Old World are sons of local traditions that belong to them, and are furthermore related to each other through a larger tradition that is almost as vast as the tradition of humanity. But when it comes to our own local tradition, we natives of the Rio de la Plata have one so short that it’s better not to mention it. Usages and customs, folklore... better

forgotten than remembered. This is my criterion. And that is why I have many times referred to the fact that we have a lack of tradition (Torres-García qtd. in Ramírez 1992, 71).

Torres-García's words are an uncanny echo of the logic of missionary discourse at the time of the evangelization of the Latin American continent. In the case of Brazil, and the Tupinambá in particular, who were perceived as utterly lacking in tradition – a nomadic tribe without law, god, or king. The task of conversion was initially framed as quite easy, since, in the words of the Jesuit Manuel da Nóbrega, “here everything is blank paper and all one must do is write as one pleases” (qtd. in Castro 2011, 21). The theoretical meta-icon of the blank slate, the view of a culture that is all exterior, patiently awaiting the indelible inscription of the one true word also animates Torres-García's fantasy of ‘virginal’ Uruguay, a country so young it can be moulded, educated, civilized, and paradoxically manipulated into discovering the truth that had always been present: all it needs is the reawakening of its own deepest essence, namely, tectonic abstraction. It is interesting to note by the way, as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro beautifully demonstrates in *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul* (2011), that in the case of the Tupinambá it is precisely this ‘Amerindian inconstancy’ that would prove such an insurmountable obstacle to conversion. The Indian soul might have been a blank page, a piece of putty to be manipulated at will, the letters – the words of the glottographic, scriptural economy full of glad tidings – would simply not ‘take,’ as if Tupi consciousness were a *Wunderblock* retaining no trace of previous inscriptions. This amorphousness, this apparent willingness to go along with the words of the other but forgetting them as soon as the word had died down and lost its rhetorical force – which in the case of the Tupi revolved around their eagerness to believe the lessons of the scriptures while being as eager to revert to their old practices of cannibalism, polygamy, warfare, excessive feasting, etc. – this radical whimsicalness proved more of an obstacle than any open resistance to the word of god, state and law ever could. Or, as Father António Vieira put it: “Even after they have come to believe, they are unbelieving” (qtd. in Castro 2011, 39). The Tupi simply did not ‘believe’ in the principle of non-contradiction, only in the

principle of a radical, immanent heteronomy.¹⁹³ Tupi reason found the notion of monoculture incomprehensible – surely there could be no such thing as only one God, one Law and one King?

Although not faced with ‘inconstancy’ per se, Torres-García reads, in a wrongheaded metonymy, the absence of traces of the Amerindian as the lack of culture altogether, and recommends a process of forgetting in order to reactivate the ‘depth’ of a repressed, cosmic memory. The colonial is dismissed as decadent, as a foreign imposition which has nothing in common with the authentic spirit of ‘Abstract man’ – the baroque is the misplaced outgrowth of a ‘minor’ European tradition derived from Renaissance figuration. What is in order is an excavation, an archaeology to those strata of purity, a regression to the most paradigmatic manifestations of geometric thought, a digging through the rubble of hybridity in order to reconstitute the integrity of an uncontaminated origin. Torres-García frames coloniality as a sudden interruption in the continuum of Indo-American history, a deviation from a rightful course that must be amended by skipping over the immaterial period of transculturation in order to jump right back to the beginning as the only option for the future of the South.

At a certain moment, [our culture’s] normal evolution was interrupted by the invaders. Which is to say, that it was buried for almost four centuries. I believe that if the autochthonous culture is to continue, it has to be taken up where it was left off, ignoring a false culture that was formed later: false in the sense that it could never be more than a transplant. And that hybrid thing (for it has mixed and become deformed) is what we call our cultures, that bastard culture that has taken shape on our continent. That exaltation of the invader and its grotesque manifestation should cease. Because the Indian was a geometer (Torres-García, qtd. in Ramírez 1992, 80).

Against the mestizo, the hybrid, the illegitimate ‘bastard,’ the deformed, Torres-García posits the ideological fantasy of the return of the Inca as encasing the truth of the South: atavism is the only valid option. The utopia of this ‘New Cusco’ is predicated on the repression of actuality. The darker side of his ‘generous’ civilizing mission – he will return the gift of the true Indo-American – is clear as day: Torres-García’s dream of the

¹⁹³ I will explore this Tupi inconstancy in detail in my discussion of Oswald de Andrade’s “Manifesto Antropófago,” which revels in this principled contrariness without clear contraries. See Chapter 7 (7.1). I also discuss Tupi inconstancy as converging with the New World baroque (Chapter 5, 5.2.5).

renaissance of a classical geometric spirit is predicated on symbolic violence, a willed blindness to actuality, to criollo and mestizo cultures alike, in favour of the exaltation of the 'pure bloodline' of the Indo-American. The myth of origin is always one of violence. Torres-García is thus invested in a highly specific image of 'America,' namely, Indo-America: "this is not Hispano-America but Indo-America," as he would insist time and time again (cf. Barnitz 1992, 146).

Reading the North with a View to the South

When reading the opening paragraphs of the manifesto-lecture "The School of the South," one must keep in mind this highly specific image of the South Torres-García proposes: 'our' South, the true South, the Indo-American South.

There should be no North for us, except in opposition to our South. That is why we now turn the map upside down, and now we know what our true position is, and it is not the way the rest of the world would like to have it. From now on, the elongated tip of South America will point consistently at the South, our North. Our compass as well; it will incline irremediably and forever toward the South, toward our pole. When ships sail from travelling north, they will be *travelling down, not up* as before. Because the North is now below. And as we face our South, the East is to the left. This is a necessary rectification; so that now we know where we are (Torres-García, qtd in Ramírez 1992, 53; emphasis in original).

That Mexico is left out of the picture has been read in corroboration of Torres-García's elevation of the Indo-American abstract paradigm as opposed to what he considered the nefarious deviations from the origin through 'hybrid' aesthetic traditions, 'folkloric' criollo art, as well as movements that sought to combine naturalism with Indo-American pictography, as in the indigenismo movement and the muralists. Perhaps the map excludes these areas since they do not subscribe to his doctrine of 'Abstract Man,' as nations beyond cure, too decadent, too creole, and 'infected' with figuration?

The map does not include Mexico, as though he wanted to distance himself from the mural painters of that land with whom he was in disagreement because they produced realistic paintings (Lopez 1991, 136).

The lack of an institutionalized, academic network in the visual arts in Montevideo at the time,¹⁹⁴ which was initially seen by Torres-García as positive, as it would enable him to make a ‘clean’ transplant of avant-garde art onto the ‘blank slate’ of a country without pictorial tradition is rooted, as noted above, in a fallacy. The notion of ‘no tradition’ is itself problematic: it presupposes that no regime of legibility/visibility is in place. Of course, there was already a regime of legibility/visibility in effect upon Torres-García’s arrival in Montevideo. The problem was that it was not the ‘correct’ one according to the principles of constructive universalism the painter imported to Uruguay. At the time, Mexico was considered a leading example of indigenous avant-garde, while abstraction had not made any inroads in South America. Torres-García’s reliance on the Andean abstract paradigm was thus a gesture to convey legitimacy onto an unfamiliar practice. Constructive universalism thus inserted itself in the artistic sphere, engaging in local, Latin American power struggles.

A more generous reading of the exclusion of the North on the map would frame it in terms of a radicalization of hemispheric authenticity, of a South uncompromised by the orientational privilege of the Northern point of the compass. The map then becomes legible as a reorientation of the world in alignment with the counter-point of the South, now identified with the privileged upward thrust, ascent, intimating the relativity of perspective. In his discussion of Inca spatial organization, Gary Urton emphasizes the

¹⁹⁴ As Barnitz observes – incidentally reiterating the notion of ‘lack of tradition’ as if it were an indisputable given – Torres-García was faced with “the reality of a country with no major museums in which conditions were vastly different from those of Europe or the United States. But he also wanted to establish a workshop that would have special relevance for South America, where great cultures had existed before the conquest but where there had been no continuity and consequently no tradition” (Barnitz 1992, 140). This image of tradition, which clearly echoes Torres-García’s own presuppositions, is precisely an image of a ‘deep,’ ‘rooted’ tradition that he inherited from the Old World, a logic he then transposed onto the South, which made the discarding of the ‘superficial’ tradition already in place as feasible and desirable. Regarding the artistic context of Montevideo upon Torres-García’s return on 30 April 1934, unwittingly demonstrating that there was indeed a legibility in place, no matter how ‘imported,’ Buzio de Torres offers the following: “Uruguayan artists, painters, and sculptors reworked imported ideas and styles like postimpressionism and art nouveau. The Old World was predominant; all aspirations were directed toward Europe, and the great game was to pretend to be living there and act accordingly. Everything was imported, from the Italian sculptor who made the equestrian statue of General Jose Artigas, the Uruguayan national hero, down to the moldings and decorative tiles inside the houses and the china on the tables” (Buzio de Torres 1992, 7-8). The fact that the Incan paradigm, or the entire Indo-American paradigm for that matter could equally be considered an ‘importation’ onto a population with such a ‘lack of tradition’ is hardly ever mentioned in discussions of constructive universalism, let alone that the discourse of ‘importation’ might itself be an ‘import product.’

epistemological effects of the locus of enunciation/viewpoint, which also touches upon the issue of visibility and discernibility. He poses the possibility of an astronomy based on a ‘view from below’ as opposed to the assumption of many scholars assuming that the northern celestial hemisphere provides the ‘natural’ clues for making the celestial sky legible, which has led to misrepresentations of Inca cosmology.

Scholars have so often approached the subject with preconceived ideas about what constitutes a system of astronomy. This leads to problems as basic as mistakenly assuming which way is ‘up’; that is, in the southern hemisphere is ‘up’ north as it is in the northern hemisphere-or is ‘up’ south? It is often assumed, moreover, that the cardinal directions are essential for an orderly system of astronomy and cosmology. However, if there is no fixed pole star marking cardinal south, as is true in the south celestial hemisphere, could not an orderly system of orientation be developed on the basis of noncardinal directions? (Urton 1981, 5).

The map has become somewhat of an icon of contestation, visual shorthand “for the ex-centric position of Latin American culture” (Lopez 1991, 136), reminding its viewers that the map harbours a political intent, through “an important play of words. In the Spanish that is spoken in Uruguay as in that of Argentina, the phrase ‘señalar un norte,’ has the figurative meaning of pointing to a goal or an objective (ibid.).” The highly particular, Rioplatense word play endows the map with an additional meaning specific to Latin America, and as such visually performs what “The School of the South” describes as its main ‘objective’ – the North it aims at – viz. the decolonizing gesture of inverting the horizon of orientation through a gesture of self-reflection, by reminding that “we live in the southern hemisphere, and that we have reversed the map, and that the southern tip of America persistently points to our north” (Torres-Gracia qtd. in Ramírez 1992, 53). Incidentally, this particular type of meaning of *The Inverted Map* (not the map itself, whose many conflicting meanings will always remain ‘to be seen’) has been commodified, used as the book cover of academic publications in which the image carries the aura of a certain amount of Latin American intransigence, as if the full meaning of the map has now become fully transparent, and readily consumable (Figure 3.6). Furthermore, as with the Che Guevara t-shirt, the *Inverted Map*, reproduced on clothing, mugs, memorabilia and other products has become a pop icon signifying rebellion, anti-conformism – activism at a distance through aesthetics (Figure 1.1).

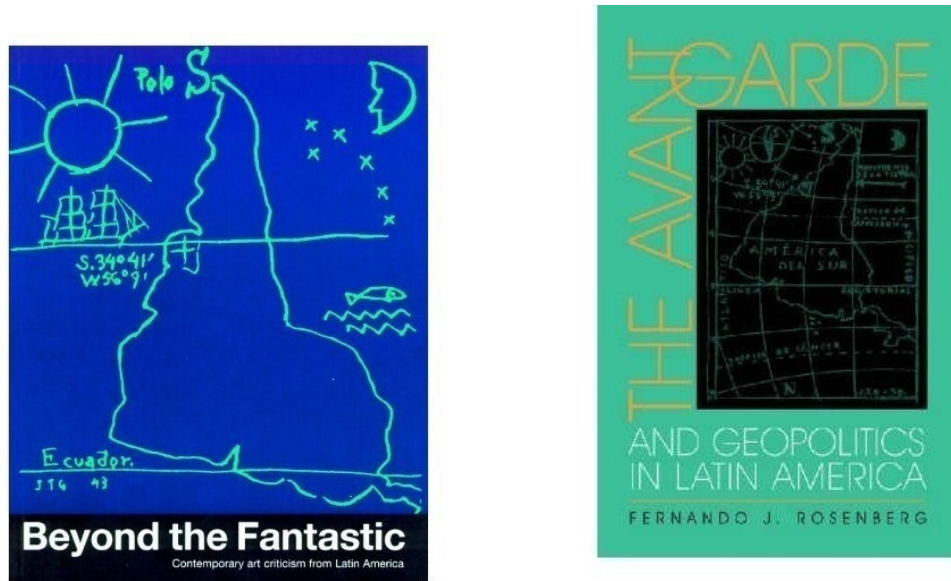


Figure 3.6 Book cover of *Beyond the Fantastic*, edited by Gerardo Mosquera (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996) and cover of *The Avant-Garde and Geopolitics in Latin America* by Fernando J. Rosenberg (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

Visibility and legibility are precisely what are at issue in the *Inverted Map*. The play of words ‘señalar un norte’ accrues in complexity when read alongside the text “The School of the South.” Placing the maps in a constellation of visibilities/legibilities by juxtaposing them with the text restores a dizzying relay of contradictory meanings to both image and word. Not only does the imagetext signal an orientation, it equally points to its contrary. In making the north vanish as stable but relational cardinal direction in favour of an absolute South (a South that is North as much as it is South), an absolute point of orientation that moves towards the ancient concept of *axis mundi*, of an *omphalos* with inherent (cosmic) significance, gives the opposite pun, ‘perder el norte,’ force. The text thus anchors, re-oriens the vertigo of the map, by giving it meaning. How to think the loss of one’s bearing as an objective? To interrogate this enigmatic question posed by the contradictory pull of the imagetext of map-manifesto, one could start by taking heed of the use of the deictic in the text, and how they relate to, or confuse the makeup of the map.

The gesture of inversion is characterized as “a necessary rectification; so that now we know where we are” (ibid., 53). *Now, here*: the mode of the present, the here and now. *We*: the mode of collectivity, of a *sensus communis* binding the sensory into a common intelligibility, a gathering of the sensory under a shared horizon. Through this correction we can now speak a common language; we now know something we did not know before, something new has opened up before our eyes, a common responsibility, the task of constructing a future in the here-now indicated by the map, the arrow and cross reminding us: ‘you are here.’ “And here we are. ... a quasi-peninsula, *as if it wanted to forge ahead in the continent to march in the vanguard*. Our geographical position, then, indicates our destiny. And we are responsible for it” (ibid., 55). This place is where ‘we’ belong, where we uncover a new destiny, a project. The land dictates to us its destiny: to forge ahead, even to the point of tearing ourselves away from the mainland, as if this land would rather break away from itself, rushing headlong into the sea, leading this continent, the South, against the rule of the tides, in defiance of nature; the task of the avant-garde imposed by the contours, the visibility, the shape of the land on the map. We are here, but we must move, lead the continent out of its slumber, to begin anew in this place, Montevideo, this accident of geography with all the “idiosyncratic nature of this [Montevidean] population,” “our people, [who] are not like those of any other city. ... It is not that there is a uniform type; on the contrary, it is extremely heterogeneous. ... For we have many types of features – one based on the European, another on the mestizo of Indian and Negro blood, and others that are almost pure Indian or Negro” (ibid., 54).

Now to write the name ‘Montevideo’ down, to pronounce the sounds, this alphabetic composition, the glottography of “the city itself, with those ten letters in a row, neither rising nor falling, equal in size, and disquieting in their pure lack of expression: MONTEVIDEO. It had to be like that. Even the name is unique” (ibid., 55). The name is so unique in that it expresses nothing specific, with its uncertain etymology, a word too young to have deep roots, not yet come of age, not ancient enough to be the locus of a deep truth, all surface, perhaps awaiting a more suitable name after its historic task has been brought to an end. What does Montevideo, this city without any character or so it seems, afford to the eye? Can it make up for its lack of expressivity in sound and writing?

Does it provide the eye with something memorable that would compensate for the lacklustre propensity to disappear in sound and typography?

Already the artist of today, who prefers to go out to our port (and not for its picturesque qualities), salutes the great transatlantic liner, observes the cranes, the piles of merchandise ... and, he doesn't even notice the picturesque touch of the sun or its reflections on the water. He sees the hangers, the letters and numbers; and other signs and the passing locomotive ... He sees all this as something ideal, because he is contemplating *forms and not things*; and their architecture. What does this mean?: It means that the romantic age of the picturesque is over and that we are faced with *the Doric age of form*. And now one doesn't even know what country he is in, for he is in the universal. And will therefore be more Uruguayan than ever. He will construct with *form* and *hue* and only then will he paint and realize that what he was doing before was literature (ibid., emphasis in original).

Ekphrasis as the great idealist ruse: the city, here-now, drifts into forgetfulness, evoking the memory of early Greek form, the universal architecture of a thought concerned with measure, the Greek miracle of geometry, making this modern port city dissolve in the blinding light of truth. Narrative art, the picturesque, the sensual work of aesthesis must be left behind. The task of the Uruguayan painter is to emulate the Greek spirit of harmony, of color and form, which is equally the emulation of Andean abstraction; both are situated on the same plane, the same universal language of line and colour. To become a truly Uruguayan artist is to renounce the South, to be in tune with the visual and verbal inexpressiveness of Montevideo, to leave the here-now for what it is and embrace the splendour of monotony...

Torres-García cannot be true to his word, that is to say, the logical field of his words belie the quirks of his maps, these manographed records of gestures made by hand. The text contradicts everything the image stands for; the drawing displaces everything the text dreams up. The left hand does not know of the labour of the right hand, while the latter is ignorant of the risks undertaken by the left. Speaking of Torres-García's *La Ciudad sin Nombre* (1941), a semi-autobiographical prose evocation of life in a nameless city – Montevideo, of course – composed in a strange hybrid of manuscript, combining calligraphy and drawing, Sarabia writes

La ciudad sin nombre constructs a liminal space in which both grammar and geometry are fused in the letter that draws and the image that names. The line of calligraphy and that of the figures are nurtured by the same ink in which the subjectivity of the artist is expressed. The corporal participation — ambidextrous in the case of Torres-García, who drew with the left hand but wrote with the right — is the definitive trait of an autograph manuscript that contrasts with the abstraction (2010, 309).

Although “The School of the South” is strictly speaking not a manuscripted text in its published format (Figure 1.5), the discrepancy between left and right, between hand-drawing and glottographic movable type, *scriptura* and *pictura*, makes the tensions between both palpable in their emblematic relationality, their complex movements of contradiction, retraction, (de-)anchoring, qualification, in short, their refusal to serve as each other’s ‘example’ or ‘model’ (cf. Whitman 2000). In fact, the map, with its shapes, words and notations, draws attention to the necessary materiality of writing, a laboriousness that exposes the claim to ideality — the transcendent universal captured in a common essence of humanity — as a wish-image, wishful thinking, a mirage. The logical field of the text, in its movement from the particular to the universal, is counteracted by the sensory field, the field of risk that holds onto the idiosyncrasies of its (con-)text, an actual eccentricity, not a prelude to a subsumption under the universal. The map-image decentres the wish-image of the text. Torres-García is stuck, here-now, in this Montevideo, and draws his way into it, no matter what his text claims: he cannot write himself out of it. The graphism of the drawing of the map, as holding the traces of the risk of drawing, transposes itself onto and eats away at the integrity of the moveable type of the pedagogical text, making it visible as texture. What the right hand transcribes in its own cadence, proclaiming the ideality of art, through the strokes of pen on paper, and the movement of the hand — the image of the movement that migrates from the handiwork of the image and to make itself known to the dictates of the lecture — is precisely what the left hand, hard at work drawing the map, refutes, together with the motion of writing. The ambidexterity of the imagetext refutes the lecture’s easy lesson: the map is indeed a “necessary rectification” (ibid., 53), but a putting right of the ‘schooling’ of discourse, by putting things upside-down in drawing.

The *mestizaje* of the map comes to haunt the ekphrasis of the city, with its eye intent on reading the ‘picturesque’ as a mere prolepsis to an invisible regime of intelligibility. Thus, the actual Montevideo serves as an exercise in the pure form of intuitions of space, a playing ground for the formal a priori of space, in which ‘Montevideo’ becomes but a concept, a word amenable to exercises in the abstract. Torres-García even admits as much, and goes one step further, making this strange ‘ode’ to Montevideo legible as what it truly is, an open insult, since the text tries to remedy the harbour city’s messiness. From idealism Torres-García moves into a reflection on the natural relation between the name ‘Montevideo’ and what it truly means. The city’s name is unique in its sheer lack of expressivity: the city itself and its heterogeneous mix of people is already a city of no character whatsoever. It is already – despite those deceptive, ‘literary,’ ‘picturesque’ appearances – universal, one only needs to perceive it in the clear light of the Idea. The houses, the streets, the locale, the chatter, dialectics and idiolects of its heterogeneous population¹⁹⁵ – the actuality of “that hybrid thing,” that “deformed,” “grotesque,” “bastard culture that has taken shape on our continent,” as he calls it in “The New Art of America” (Torres-García qtd. in Ramírez 1992, 80) – all its specificity, despite being so “peculiarly its own that it is unmistakable” (ibid., 53), vanishes under the piercing artistic mind’s eye. It is an eye animated by an inner light – “without fear of pleonasm I call it luminous light” (ibid.) – that sees through the visible to uncover the very structures of intelligibility itself.

This attempt to recreate shared structures of intelligibility through line and colour required a universal art that presented itself as anonymous, an anonymity that, according to Torres-García’s doctrine of Abstract Man, was characteristic of all great art throughout history, as manifested in Egyptian pyramids, the medieval Gothic cathedral, the art of Byzantium, as well as that of the Mayas and Incas. Torres-García’s “quasi-religious

¹⁹⁵ Perhaps the ideal of becoming more Uruguayan so as to become more universal – more human than human – alludes to José Vasconcelos’s doctrine of the cosmic race, a future hyper-hybrid universal humanity combining all the best traits of individual ethnic groups, giving rise, in the South, of a eugenic paradise, a future master-race (cf. Madureira 2005, 31-33). This would suit Torres-García’s interpretive needs, as he can accommodate – and thereby disavow – the notion of ‘mixture’ under the rubric of universality, thus bypassing the intermediate, actual, colonial, messy states necessary for the achievement of this racial ideal.

concept of art” (Buzio de Torres 1992, 8) led him and his followers to sign their work with the acronym A.A.C. (and later TTG). This religious overtone made constructive universalism markedly different from Russian constructivism, which was equally invested in anonymity, but from an opposite perspective informed by the consolidation of a wholly new social-secular order, rather than the salvaging of an ancient cosmology.

Torres-García, like

the Russian and international constructivists, called for an anonymous art, though for different reasons. For the Russians, individualism interfered with the new social order; for him, giving individual expression priority in any creative act lowered the value of the resulting art (ibid., 8).

The idea of constructive universalism as a “universal science” (Torres-García qtd. in ibid.) is at odds with the insistence on the particularity of the *here-now* the manifesto proffers. More precisely, it is the movement of the text from the insistence on the specificity to its dissolution in the ideal that replicates, in miniature, the overall ideology of constructive universalism as it reads particularity under the sign of universality. “The School of the South” starts from the seemingly irreducible specificity of the *here-now* of the South, only to end at the universal *everywhere-everywhen* – the *nowhere* of his utopian dream image – the ultimate terminus of a will to abstraction subtending all great historical periods.¹⁹⁶

This terminus is at the same time posited as the locus of a new beginning made possible through a radical forgetting of history, of coloniality. The movement the text orchestrates is in essence the movement of the act of amnesia of the colonial present for the sake of the anamnesis of a mythical pre-Columbian, uncontaminated ‘Southern’ present. Space and time become indiscernible in this construction of an anti-historical present with no place of its own. In its desire for absolute autonomy, the absolute self-positing of South America as the zero point (0,0) of its own origin and artistic destiny, the heterogeneous must be expelled. Montevideo is purified of the picturesque through a

¹⁹⁶ For more on the notion of utopia, as well as its imbrication with ideology, see my discussion of the exhibit *Inverted Utopias* in Chapter 4 (4.2 and 4.3). For a discussion of utopia in connection with Svetlana Boym’s (2002) distinction between “reflective” and “restorative” nostalgia, see Chapter 1 (1.2). There, I also briefly discuss Foucault’s (1998) concept of ‘heterotopia’ with respect to Joaquín Torres-García’s *Inverted Map*.

blinding light that remakes it in the image of “blank paper,” and “all one must do is write as one pleases.” This forgetting – a wilful forgetting, not an involuntary forgetfulness – is the negation of history, the historicity that outlines the specific contours of the here-now, of denying its relevance for the present; it is to pretend it never happened, to wish it away, to build a foundation upon the fantasy that colonialism never took place. This is precisely how Torres-García formulates his intent to

convert the foreign into our *own substance*. Because I believe that the epoch of colonialism and importation is over (I am now referring to culture more than anything else), and so, away! with anyone who uses any other language than *ours*, for literature (and I don’t mean the criollo language), whether he is writing, painting, or composing music (in Ramírez, 1992, 55).

Consistent with his a-political stance, he conceives the colonial in purely aesthetic terms – “I am now referring to culture more than anything” – so he can bypass its political implication. Coloniality is a matter of bad taste, of poor artistic habits. The colonial is squarely identified with the criollo, the Hispanic-American, as a ‘decadent’ outgrowth of Europe while the Indo-American is seen as wholly distinct from the Hispanic: For Torres-García, their combination can only lead to abominations, to the ‘grotesque’ mestizo baroque. Figuration is figured as a disease, a virus giving birth to aesthetic ‘miscarriages,’ whereas abstraction, and pure, primitive, classical abstract Indo-American man is the ideal, the figure of a tradition that must be given birth to again. In his book *Estructura*, published in the same year he delivered his lecture (1935), Torres-García returns to his drawing of the inverted map, and extracts an even more radical lesson from it

realizing that our position on the globe is above and horizontal... And that Europe, Asia, and Africa, countries which have nothing to do with us, are below. Another world, then. And to another world, another art. Specifically, art of this *Escuela del Sur* [School of the South] which concentrates on its own problems (and Europe must be totally forgotten) (qtd. in Buzio de Torres 1992, 13).

Europe, Asia, and Africa have nothing to teach to America. The task constructive universalism sets before itself is a radical self-enclosure, so as to commune with its Indo-American origin, as manifesting, in the memorable words of Juan Fló, “the need to divest oneself of the borrowed in order to achieve a vacuum from which to be born” (Fló 1992,

37). This desire for the vacuum registered by the text's idealizing movement is what the image reveals as impossible to fulfill: the dream image of the text is parodied by the *Inverted Map*, a "necessary correction" to the lecture's symbolic violence: what the words try to forget the image brings back to mind. The graphisms of sun, moon, stars and ship, as well as the manugraphed letters and numbers combined with the cartographical grid, all bring back the overdeterminations of colonial memory. What the text performatively proclaims as 'invisible' – an ever-present now as the time of the end of colonialism, the utopian wish to be free from history – the drawing brings back to life, giving shape to the repressed, showing that the other continents have everything to do with 'us.' The image is mixed, drawn from a strangely hybrid perspective, where image, pictogram, geographic notation and the alphabet – the scriptural economy through which the pre-Columbian was captured – intermingle with pictograms that can be read as traces of both Indo-American and European descent.

The map is drawn from a perspective denouncing the neo-colonialism of the lecture, a perspective that upholds the irreducibility of the particular here-now in counterpoint to the future anterior of the manifesto, the latter speaking as if the colonial has always already been a thing of the past. The 'here, now' of the gesture of putting the map upside-down, the concreteness of the hand occupied with its making, endows it with a history that erases the text's movement towards dis-remembering. The ink of the drawing pen retraces the text's ideal movement toward the white sheet with indelible lines that trace out involuntary memories. Not only do the hypericons-graphisms deconstruct Torres-García's dream of an autonomous art, the map itself can be considered as part of a mestizo aesthetic of map-making. From this perspective, Torres-García's map becomes visible as a hyper-map.

Constructive Universalism's Mapping of *Mestizaje*

There are two specific loci of visual analogy that have been put forward and that suggest an alternate, mestizo genealogy for Torres-García's *Inverted Maps*. On the one hand, the drawing of the conceptual model of the Coricancha temple (Figure 3.7), from around

1613, by chronicler Juan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti Yamqui Salcamaygua (from his *Relación de anteguedades deste Reyno del Pirú*), has been suggested as a possible antecedent to Torres-García's map.

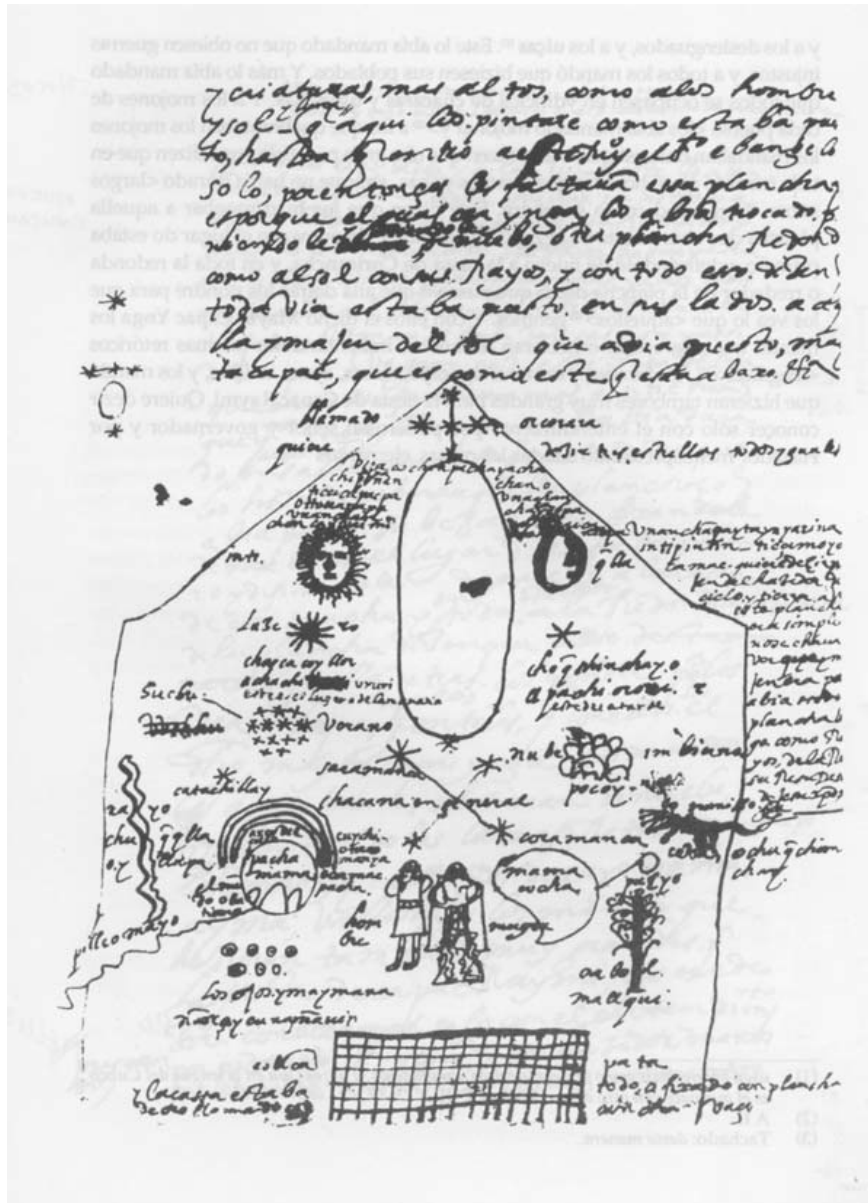


Figure 3.7 Cosmological drawing, Juan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti Yamqui Salcamaygua, in *Relación de anteguedades deste Reyno del Pirú*, 1613. Ink on paper, fol. 13v. Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid (Ms. 3169). [http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-888ghazLQI0/TvKHcEr3OgI/AAAAAAAAADY/eSt8_f61Jj4/s320/Esquema%2Bde%2BSantacruz%2BPachacuti%2B-%2BQoricancha.jpg]

The graphism of moon, stars, sun and the central shape – intimating the ‘South’ on Torres-García’s map – play a central role in Sebastián Lopez’s production of visual resemblances, making the *Inverted Map* a palimpsest of hybrid Indo-Hispanic visibilities/legibilities, precisely what Torres-García would not allow into the strict confines of his logic. Speaking of Torres-García’s first published version of the map (Figure 1.3), Lopez notes that

the map includes what Torres-García knew about the art and culture of the Incas. In the upper part, it has a half moon on the right and the sun on the left, while in the centre is the constellation of the Southern Cross. Torres-García’s fantasy seemed to be inspired by the relations between the forces of nature in the temple of Korikancha in Cuzco which the chronicler, Santacruz Pachacuti depicted in circa 1615. In it we see Urcurara (the constellation of Orion) at the top; on the right hand side is Q(ui)lla, (the moon); on the left we find Inti (the sun) and in the centre, the site of Viracocha pachayacha (Viracocha was the creator of the world), Torres-García replaced him with the inverted map of South America (Lopez 1991, 136-137).

These visual associations undermine Torres-García’s fantasy of a ‘new beginning.’ The *Inverted Map* shows that the beginning has always already been underway, and his map cannot undo the traces of mestizo visibilities. In fact, his map is the continuation of this aesthetics of *mestizaje*, as Pachacuti Yamqui’s ‘text’ is itself an imagetext, playing off the tension between writing and drawing. Or rather, it puts manuscript – the carefully handcrafted letters – on a plane of continuity with drawing, a plane that renders the distinction between (hyper-)iconicity and glottography indiscernible. The anarchy of the demon of analogy provides routes of insight that have a visual logic, a logic that plays on the sensory rather than the logical field. In principle, the movement of visual analogy, the production of resemblances through speech and writing is irrepressible. The interface between word and image, as the space of the *modus operandi* of resemblance and analogy, constitutes a ‘diagrammatics of thought.’¹⁹⁷ As soon as a resemblance is given body in word, as soon as an image is said to resemble something, this image will be approached in the light of this difference through resemblance, even if it is to refute this

¹⁹⁷ I will give a full account of diagrammatology, conceived as the heuristic operation the image gives rise to in its provocation of words, in Chapter 7 (7.1), where I propose the term ‘emblematics’ as a reading/viewing stance that takes into account the constitutive interweaving of legibility and visibility.

new legibility. What the resemblance between Pachacuti Yamqui's and Torres-García's drawings effects – no matter how 'correct' the analogy – is a reconsideration of the one through the other, as well as making visible the binds spots in the lecture "The School of the South," and charging it with a new legibility.

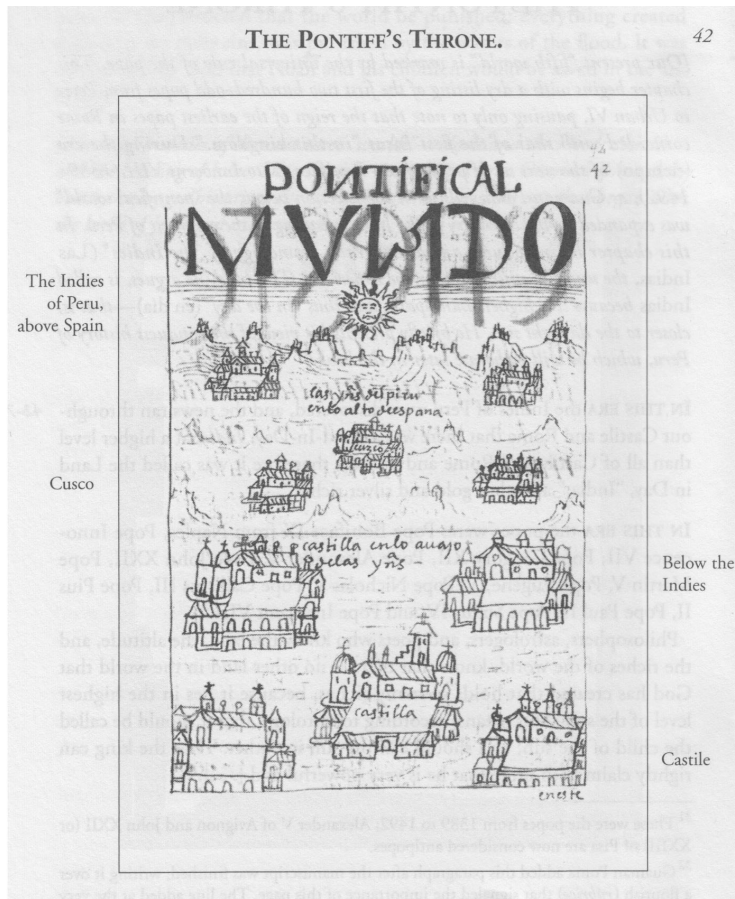


Figure 3.8 Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, *Pontifical Mundo*. Manuscript, 1613. Page 42 of *Primer nueva corónica y bien gobierno*, 42. Royal Library of Denmark, Copenhagen. [Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*, edited by David L. Frye (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 42].

Another locus of resemblance, which opens up the discrepancy between the logical field of the "School of the South" in relation to the image it purportedly anchors, is Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's drawing *Pontifical Mundo*, part of his *Primer nueva corónica y bien gobierno* (1613). Referring to Torres-García's second version of the map (Figure 1.5), Paul Vandenbroeck points out that

with this drawing, Torres-García unconsciously repeats the vision of the Indian chronicler Guaman Poma de Ayala from around the year 1600: in a sketch of the world ('mundo'), he depicts the sun above the Andes with Cuzco and symbols of the four 'suyu', and then Spain at the bottom. There is a superscription which reads: 'Las Indias del Peru en lo alto de España' (The Indians of Peru above Spain), and below: 'Castilla en lo abajo de las Indias' (Castile under the Indians) (Vandenbroeck 1991, 316).

Echoing Gary Urton's observation (see above) on the Western astronomical regime of legibility/visibility that has tended to misrepresent Inca cosmology because of the naturalization of its own perspective – the Northern hemisphere – which it has mistakenly transposed onto incompatible cosmologies, Vandenbroeck takes the resemblance between both drawings as a means to reflect on the contingency of spatial organization, and the instability of such basic, seemingly transparent terms as 'up' and 'down':

the Northern Hemisphere has a different group of celestial constellations than the Southern, thereby imparting different patterns of orientation. This is of fundamental importance: the perception of the heavenly bodies has since millennia provided every culture with its world-vision. This has 'played tricks' on investigators right up to today: in this way, European and North American researchers have at times misread (given their 'northern' point of view) the 'ceques' system of the Inca. What for them was respectively, 'under' and 'over,' was precisely the reverse for the Incas. Ethnocentrism, thus, can emanate from a projection of one's own sense of 'space' upon that of another culture (ibid.).

Different regimes of visibility/legibility imply different worlds, different logics. The colonial encounter was an event in which legibilities and visibilities were put under immense pressure, and underwent fundamental changes, both in East and West, North and South. The *Inverted Map* is the belated registration, an after-image of constellations of intelligibility meeting to the point of disorientation. Torres-García's map enacts the vertigo upon losing one's bearing (*perder el norte*), the paradox of being at a loss even after having found one's objective (*señalar el norte*). Orientation and disorientation become almost indistinguishable: the South has truly become a North, no longer able to provide a fixed point of reference. Torres-García's "necessary rectification" turns out to be nothing other than this vertigo. Incidentally, Torres-García's fantasy of the pure 'vacuum' as the precondition for a profoundly new art, which is at the same time profoundly ancient, was shared by the surrealists. This, at least, is what Leroi-Gourhan

maintains in *Gesture and Speech*, namely that surrealist innovation was animated by a desire to return to the most authentic, primal expression. However, as Leroi-Gourhan argues, the attainment of the absolutely new is impossible, unless memory (and the idea of time) itself were to be obliterated:

The fact that surrealism coincided with a passionate interest in primitive arts is obviously not fortuitous. Trying to find a way out by going back to the beginnings of time goes together with rejecting that part of the development of art during which symmetry and perspective were developed and values became ordered in a narrative succession. The difference between the beginning and the end is, however, that the Paleolithic artists were innovating whereas the Surrealists tried to renovate, that is to say, they tried to construct something unconstructed out of scraps of obsolescent material. A really new beginning would require humankind to forget the art of the Mediterranean cultures (which has now become planetary) and cease to understand ancient Greece, medieval Italy, the Flemish, the moderns, all painting-even if it is at odds with tradition-and all music inspired by the maturing of centuries (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 397).

Torres-García's project, animated by the same ambition to remake the word, employs a similar tactic as that of the surrealists. His formulation of constructive universalist doctrine is premised on the same principle, that is, the collage of "scraps of obsolete material."¹⁹⁸ However, in addition to the fact that Torres-García never exposes the artifice involved in his construction of the Indo-American primitive, his salvaging operation is not intent on the construction of "something unconstructed," but, on the contrary, on the reconstruction of the principle of constructability as such, the primordial will to geometry, a rationalist-vitalist conatus. Furthermore, Torres-García cannot forget: the notion of a deep tradition is what underlies his entire project. He wants the new to coincide with the old, to bring about a break with the present through the revalidation of ancient cosmologies. He cannot forget Greece, his memory, his Neoclassicism prevents him from truly believing in the revolutionary potential of his discourse; he assuages his radical insights by subsuming the 'new' Indo-American paradigm under the sway of the 'Greek miracle' – the de-colonial potential of his philosophy is voiced through the most colonial of moods. Torres-García even traces a fundamental analogy between Inca and

¹⁹⁸ See the Conclusion for some of the documentary material Torres-García used in the construction of his theory.

Greek architecture, in which the Inca becomes legible through the exemplum of the Greek, a “geometric thought” comparable to what had already “crystallized in Greece like a pure diamond” (qtd. in Paternosto 1998, 218) – the Inca were merely dressed up Greeks.

If coloniality is what Torres-García consistently disavows in his texts, his images never fail to bring it back. The visual layering of the map, its characteristic as palimpsest, also refers back to the image of abstraction that Torres-García imported to Montevideo. Against his own performative dictum that “the epoch of colonialism and importation is over” (qtd. in Ramírez, 1992, 55) of which constructive universalism would constitute the first example, his own philosophy of art is in fact the accommodation of a complex model that interweaves the European discourse on primitivism, geometric abstraction and the elevation of the Indo-American into the tectonic paradigm. In the context of Montevideo, the pre-Columbian model was not ‘native’ by any means; Torres-García constructed an image of authenticity according to his own doctrinal system which he then presented as the only logical and truly indigenous option possible.

In addition, his theoretical discourse was itself an accretion of studies undertaken in Europe; this moment of accumulation is the necessary condition for the construction of his idea of abstraction, an idea rooted in the epistemic undertakings of ethnography and archeology concomitant with the vogue for primitive art in the European centres of the avant-garde. His stay in Paris – the many hours spent at the Trocadéro, his visit to the 1928 exhibition of pre-Columbian art, his brief embrace of *art nègre* – during the twenties and early thirties was seminal in the production of his image of authentic Indo-American art.

In Paris in 1928, Torres had the opportunity of seeing an important exhibition of pre-Columbian art (Les arts anciens de l’Amérique [Paris: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, May-June 1928]). Torres and his elder son Augusto, who worked at the Musée Trocadéro, were admirers of North American Indian art and very often visited this museum, known today as the Musée de l’Homme. In 1929, Augusto Torres made drawings of ceramic pieces in the museum’s collection and later put together his own significant collection of North American Indian artefacts (Buzio de Torres 1992, 24).

In his theoretical texts, Torres-García obscures the ‘provenance’ of his insights, once again attesting to his desire to bypass the history of colonialism in the name of a radically indigenous art, radical in terms of its purity, of its independence from any model other than its own, as if his discourse were solely borne out of the pure act of looking at pre-Columbian art. Against this naturalization of the gaze, one must insist, once again, that Torres-García produced the Indo-American through constructive universalism, and not the other way round.

The *Inverted Map* lays bare the overdetermination of these routes to roots.¹⁹⁹

Torres-García, through his inversion of the map, and the pointing – through the cross – of a new origin, a new navel of the world, transposes Cusco to Montevideo. The map indicates the artificiality of the ‘naturalness’ of the body politic, of cultural politics. Cusco, imported from Peru – since Uruguay was ‘lacking’ in a monumental indigenous artistic tradition – is overlaid onto Montevideo. Or rather, the Trocadéro is displaced and moved to Montevideo, via Cusco. The origin, the navel, is artificially produced: having had time to germinate in Paris for the first few years, as a collage of disparate visual traditions put together into the aggregate of ‘Abstract Man’ – an ideal of abstraction made possible through a patchwork of texts, readings, photos, museum research (cf.

¹⁹⁹ Incidentally, in his response to Byron Ellsworth Hamann’s essay “Interventions: The Mirrors of *Las Meninas*: Cochineal, Silver, and Clay” (2010, 6-35), Walter D. Mignolo adds a new twist to the re-routings by considering Diego Velázquez’s baroque painting *Las Meninas* (1656) in the context of Inca-Hispanic visual *mestizaje*. Coincidentally, Mignolo’s “Response: *Las Meninas*: A Decolonial Response” (2010, 40-47) reproduces both Pachacuti Yamqui’s ‘cosmological drawing’ as well as Guamán Poma’s *Pontifical Mundo*. He traces a resemblance between Velázquez’s and Yamqui’s drawing in terms of a displaced locus of enunciation, observing that “rather than the object of the painting reflected in the mirror and the act of painting being the representation, as in *Las meninas*, what we have in Santa Cruz Pachacuti’s drawings are the traces of a non-European cosmology transposed into recognizable European signs. As in Velázquez, there is a shift, a dislocation between the enunciation and the enunciated, a dislocation that reveals, in both cases, two different intellectual and semiotic trajectories: the imperial modern subject of the European Renaissance and the modern/colonial subject of Tawantinsuyu/Reyno del Piru (Viceroyalty of Peru)” (Mignolo 2010, 42-43). A similar superimposition of visuality is traceable in Guamán Poma’s manuscript drawings. Torres-García’s inverted maps can be considered as further compounding the legibilities and visibilities of the Inca-Hispanic, overlaying them with a European avant-garde ‘ethnographic abstraction’ rerouted back to a ‘displaced’ Inca realm now relocated to Uruguay. As this essay only recently came to my attention, time was lacking to explore its full implications for constructive universalism. For a discussion of Foucault’s reading of *Las Meninas* in the context of the Neobaroque aesthetic of antropofagia, see Chapter 7 (7.1).

Figures 8.3 to 8.7) – is reimported into his ‘native’ land, and signified as ‘natural,’ as ‘authentic.’

Emblematics shows how an origin is a matter of a decision, a scission, effected by overlays of writing and drawing.²⁰⁰ It is the effect of ‘rending’ (*writan*), in contradiction to the naturalness suggested by the organicist metaphor of ‘omphalos,’ of a birth and the scar it leaves. ‘Here’ is where we must begin, by fiat, thanks to the portability of the origin, not by some deep rootedness, but through ‘superficial’ rootedness – a ‘routedness,’ a never-ending cycle of exportations, importations, re-importations. An origin is a condensation of history of displacements: this, if any, is the lesson of the *Inverted Map*. This decision on origin, the artifice of originality is in a sense a simulation of the Inca myth of origin, the sons of the Gods settling in Cusco, as a retrospective legitimization of their rule. Torres-García rehearses the same ideological operation, in the guise of utopia.²⁰¹

Torres-García’s trajectory ends with the end of his illusion. Finally, it seems, the fascination with naturalism would lead to a renunciation of strict orthodoxy, allowing a progressive re-incorporation of figuration, that eternal ‘temptress.’ There is a certain Protestant pathos at work in his view on art, replicated by his commentators, who seem to empathize with his ‘monastic’ wrestling with the beast of figuration, which constantly tested his resolve, his faith in the virtues of geometry.

Torres acknowledged his constant struggle between his preference for the classism of geometric painting and his temptation toward the romanticism of realist painting. He always experienced painting to the depths of his being-the act of painting was for him a sensual experience.

²⁰⁰ The notion of emblem derives from the Greek *emballein*, which means ‘to insert,’ or more literally ‘to throw in.’ The emblem foregrounds the ‘insertion’ of legibilities and visibilities in the composition of heterogeneous word-image combination. As I have demonstrated in Chapter 2 (2.2 and 2.3), Torres-García’s theory of grafismo fails to grasp the constitutive tension between his regime of legibility and the visibility it purports to capture. The insertion and disjunction between the visible and the legible is covered over by a classical, symbolic reading (cf. Benjamin 1977) predicated on the self-sufficiency of the symbol. I will explore a heuristic of the emblematic, conceived as a precarious methodology since the relation between the legible and the visible is continuously under deconstruction, warding off fixity, in Chapter 7 (7.1).

²⁰¹ Following Paul Ricoeur (1988), I will elaborate on the intertwining of utopia and ideology in Chapter 7 (7.2.1).

Nevertheless, he was equally fervent in his belief in geometry, order, synthesis, construction, and the rhythm that should reign in the work, over and above all passions. To sustain this ideal among his students was as difficult as sustaining it for himself (Buzio de Torres 1992, 116).

This is indeed the paradox animating his work: how to believe in painting as a decidedly ‘sensory experience’ while at the same time professing belief in the superiority of geometry and abstraction? One of his students, Anhelio Hernandez recounts one of his master’s tempestuous outbursts directed against figuration, recalling that

Torres equated abstract painting with the summit of a mountain and figurative painting with the plain: ‘You people always want to bring me back down to the plain,’ Torres reproached his students. Many times, when he found them heading too far into the fascination of naturalistic painting, great storms would break out, during which large numbers of portraits, landscapes, and still lives would be destroyed; afterward, Torres would announce a ‘change of direction, starting today’ (qtd. in *ibid.*, 115).

Torres-García never achieved ‘reconciliation,’ ‘solution’ or synthesis, but only gestures towards something stable: the paradox cannot be resolved through intellectual intuition. His work was always the moment in an oscillation between the ‘natural’ (naturalism) and the abstract, with naturalism as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, always pulling him back over the brink. The destruction of his pupils’ paintings is the scene of a recognition, that, after all his teachings, his students only remembered the ‘decadent,’ the hybrid, the ‘picturesque.’ Perhaps, all he had ever done was paint hybridity.

To conclude, as *coup de grâce*, a crowning irony. North and South, so it seems, are Western impositions, and are not grounded in Inca cosmology: the South truly was the invention of the North. The Inca only knew East and West as fixed positional points, while North and South were always formulated as relational terms of bodily orientation and movement. To quote Paternosto,

the Incas recognized only two orientations: the east, *anti*, the rising sun; and the west, *konti*, the setting sun. The Incas lacked any word for ‘north’ or ‘south,’ which were designated by known geographical directions: ‘north,’ for example, was ‘the road to Quito’ (Paternosto 1996, 10).

Instead of South ‘as opposed to’ North then, the contingent, the chiasm of word and image: *South is North and North is South, and always the twain shall meet.*

**Part 2 Antropofagia as Model of Thought: Routes
to/of Roots, Emblematics and Baroque
Inconstancy**

Chapter 4

4 Inverted Utopias, Diagrammatics and Constellations, or How (Not) To Make (Latin American) Art Newly Visible/Legible in Synch with an “Epoch of Simultaneity”

4.1 Diagrammatics, Constellations and Inverted Utopias

How to make visual art newly legible and visible today? How to make art relevant in the present, which, as Mari Carmen Ramírez maintains, quoting Michel Foucault, is the “epoch of simultaneity, the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (Ramírez 2004, 1)? And, to further complicate things, how to do justice to Latin American art²⁰² in a Western museological setting, without being entirely complicit with the latter’s underlying teleological principles, which would fix ‘Southern’ art objects as specimens of ‘exoticism’ or ‘primitivism’ – as mere ‘representatives’ of an ‘aesthetic style’ ‘deviating’ from the canon? How can one address space-time ‘discontinuities’ that might open up new understandings running counter to such essentialization? If these were the questions animating my re-reading/re-viewing of the work of Torres-García in Part 1, then they will become even more central in Part 2.

The matter at hand is how to avoid – or at least distance oneself from – the trappings of, to use Donald Preziosi’s term, “museocannibalism” (Preziosi 1998, 57-63). Preziosi uses this term in the essay “Avoiding Museocannibalism,” which is one of the introductory texts of the *XXIV Bienal de São Paulo* catalogue.²⁰³ Museocannibalism names the ever-expanding inscription of otherness – a process accelerating even more

²⁰² It is important to keep in mind how the idea of ‘Latin America’ compresses difference. Indeed, it functions as what Theodor Adorno would call a cover-concept (cf. below) eliding discontinuities while obfuscating the “plural stages of development and [the] multiethnic diversity of a geographical and cultural expanse as vast as that represented by more than twenty nations on the continent” (Ramírez and Olea 2004: xv). I can therefore only concur with Ramírez’s and Olea’s use of ‘Latin America’ as “a unifying construct for this complexity” (Ibid.).

²⁰³ In Herkenhoff and Pedrosa 1998 (vol. 1), 57-63.

with the growth of always-new technologies – through “an epistemological technology” rooted in the “Enlightenment invention of the modern museum” and its concomitant strategy of “defining, formatting, and ‘re-presenting’ many forms of social behaviour by means of their products or relics” (ibid., 57). Interestingly, the essay is a “summary of part of the argument” of Preziosi’s *The Art of Art History* (1998),²⁰⁴ as the footnote in the *Bienal* catalogue indicates (63, n1).²⁰⁵ The placement (or displacement) of the essay to a South American context immediately activates a critical stance, as its mere presence suggests that the Brazilian museum, as an ‘imported’ institution with colonial roots, might be complicit in the techniques and methods of Western epistemology. On the other hand, the term ‘cannibalism’ also signals a vital difference: cannibalism is not synonymous with the South-American cultural tactic of *antropofagia*, as inaugurated by Oswald de Andrade’s “Anthropophagite Manifesto,” which will be explored more fully in the next chapter. To keep things lapidary for the moment, let us say that the best antidote to ‘Northern’ museocannibalism is ‘Southern’ *antropofagia*.²⁰⁶ I believe Preziosi – inspired by a certain reading of Foucault’s work, making the museum-space legible as a panoptical device only – overestimates the absolute power of inscription of the museum, as if the work of art is exhausted by how it is framed institutionally. If anything, my study is devoted to breaking through this fantasy of absolute power accorded by dedicated ‘hermeneuts’ of suspicion who cannot even imagine aesthesis as a possible locus of counter-power, as posing a utopian counterforce, however compromised this site may be.

²⁰⁴ A second edition of this work was published in 2009. See Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁰⁵ The essay is a reworking of “Epilogue: The Art of Art History,” in Preziosi ([1998] 2009, 488-509).

²⁰⁶ Incidentally, my usage of the term ‘legibility,’ and its essential intertwining with ‘visibilities,’ is also indebted to Preziosi (1998). However, contrary to Preziosi, I allow for more flexibility in their arrangement, and I am more interested in the ways configurations are forced to ‘regroup’ through irruptions of visibility that have no clear conceptual anchoring – zones of indeterminacy.

The Model

Another possible way of avoiding conceptual imperialism – this cold, ‘Northern’ ‘museocannibalism’ of Spirit – is through the notion of ‘constellation’²⁰⁷ as a metaphor for a diagrammatic way of thinking through artistic production prompted by the work of art rather than framing the latter through the terms provided exclusively by the vocabulary of an analytical discursive model. The latter approach merely replicates the image of structure rather than engaging with the image, painting or sculpture itself. Instead, it further solidifies the confidence of its self-conception, the truth it seems to promise, again and again, without ever destabilizing its self-sufficiency. By using such reiterable, universalizable models, the specificity of what it models is only thinkable within the confines of the framework. As such, each individual work will ‘exemplify’ and merely reiterate what was already ‘known’ in advance: the possibility of the disruption of the integrity of the *idea* of structure, of the material being modelled infecting the architectonic of the model and thereby dislocating the belief of transposibility to different contexts, i.e., the very status of the model as model, is never posed in earnest. Even – or perhaps, especially – Lacanian psychoanalysis does not allow doubt as to the truth of its topological makeup, as to the idea of topology in all its generality. Its topological structure, the Borromean intertwining of the symbolic, the real, the imaginary – even allowing for the later modification of the knot through the *sinthome* – is never interrogated; each specific instance can be read in terms of a variation of either of these terms; never is their generalizability a serious object of inquiry. Speaking from a meta-modelling perspective, even the undoing of the ‘rings’ must be read via the terms provided by the model: non-meaning has its specific locus in this topology and is made legible as the effect of the redistribution and eventual floundering of the terms

²⁰⁷ The notion of ‘constellation’ as a critical tool received its first systematic, philosophical articulation in Walter Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* ([1928] 1977), i.e., in the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” (27-56). Theodor Adorno took up the notion, appreciative of its immanent methodology, which he himself was formulating at the time (cf. Buck-Morss 1977, 93), and gave it even greater force of immanence by situating it within his historical-materialist perspective. Adorno in fact resemanticized Benjamin’s ‘constellation’ “with the aid of Marxist theory” to highlight “its historically specific social content” (ibid., 95), in contrast to Benjamin’s more strictly philosophical understanding of the term. The term would play a considerable role in *Negative Dialectics* (1973) as away to unlock to force of the ‘non-identical’ (see below for more on the relation between negative dialectics and the notion of ‘constellation’).

(‘symbolic,’ ‘imaginary,’ ‘real’) the model sets forth. Contingency does not truly upset the integrity of the *terms* the model provides. What is modelled is ‘spoken for’ by the terms and relations within the paradigm: the paradigm stays intact and can even make ‘sense’ of non-meaning, in terms of the destructuring of the model’s master-terms. Yet, the lesson of ‘non-meaning’ does in the end not upset the idea of the model itself: each term will remain and play its part in every new analysis, if only to ‘illustrate’ and demonstrate the pattern, the scenario in which hermeneutics will inevitably run aground, pierced by the ‘real.’ The contingency, the radical historicity, the coloniality of that which comes under the purview of the structure does not insinuate itself on the level of the terms the model provides, leaving it intact, applicable to each new ‘case,’ to each new ‘session.’ Even when it claims to broach nonsense, the makeup of the model is strangely impervious to non-meaning and the challenge of historicity posed by the ‘case,’ at least, and I cannot emphasize this enough, form a meta-modelling vantage point (that the terms of the model only changed little over time might be an indication of its claim to a-historical universalizability). From Félix Guattari’s perspective, each model is its own meta-model, and the terms of the model must change in order to actually think what the particular ‘modelled’ offers the model in terms of resistance to it: the meta-model takes serious the alterity of the legibility/visibility of what it attempts to work through. Such a model is heuristic, not explanatory in orientation, and by that token, it is historically malleable, operating on a similar ‘level’ of contingency to what it models. Modelling is the self-transformation of the model through what it lets in. The model as meta-model reflects critically on its status as model, allowing the authority it claims to be displaced by the phenomena it seeks to think.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Even if the ‘core’ is strictly speaking ‘nothing,’ the ‘classical’ division between ‘real,’ ‘symbolic’ and ‘imaginary’ remains (even with the revisions in ‘later Lacan’). It is the idea of structuration that is at issue here, and the differences assumed between the levels of discourse, that is, between a-historical universality (‘symbolic’). That is to say, the idea that the interrelation between these three is what is always at stake, that the model must always be invoked in an analysis even if it is to show how the ‘rings’ in the knot come loose. That what is modelled does not enter the configuration to upset the distribution of the terms (adding more and more ‘rings’ to the model to the point of implosion) is indicative of the fact that the analysis precedes on the distinction between the general and the specific. The specific, aesthesis, is only allowed its ‘say’ by the terms provided by the structure (even in the guise of ‘symptom,’ or the ‘real,’ as the latter becomes emblematic of non-meaning, it must enter into this hermeneutic economy). Conversely, the terms of the model may function on the level of what is modelled by it, making the entire operation a meta-

In counterpoint to the static model, there is the dynamism and generative power of the diagram. As John Mullarkey observes with reference to Guattari's philosophical diagram, it "works as a drawing, a process, a procedure, a temporary moment in between; not the shape of a thing but the outline of a process (of thinking). Hence, *diagrammes* should be always seen as moving forms, whether or not they are static" (Mullarkey 2006, 157). My use of the concept of diagrammatics – the name of a praxis rather than a species of representation – is thus indebted to Félix Guattari's diagrammatic, generative models as an alternative to the autarchic model.²⁰⁹ In Guattari's conception, diagrams are generative of thought and are therefore "no longer, strictly speaking, semiotic entities" (qtd. in Watson 2009, 12). Guattari's models are productive and heuristic: the diagrammatical model is receptive to the influx of legibility and visibility of what it tries to think, and as such it allows itself to be altered by these recalcitrant images and words. The model's "purpose is not to denote or to image the morphemes of an already constituted referent, but to produce them" (ibid.). The diagrammatic model produces its own figures of thought, which loop back into a dynamic of new combinations of legibility/visibility. This makes the model, and the system that informs modeling, inherently resistant to universality and systematization. What can count as model is equally subjected to a-semiotic proliferation; the repertoire of "system's self-modeling" (Guattari 1996, 97) is infinite, and as such it remains mindful of particularity. As Guattari formulates it,

In my view, all systems for defining models are in a sense equal, all are tenable, but only to the extent that their principles of intelligibility renounce any universalist pretensions, and that their sole mission be to help map real existing territories (sensory, cognitive, affective and aesthetic universes) - and even then only in relation to carefully delimited areas and periods. ... In this kind of system, discursive links, whether of expression or of content, obey ordinary logics of

modelling. Cf. Watson (2009, 10-12) on the static, universalist core stabilizing the idea of Lacanian topology.

²⁰⁹ In Chapter 7 (7.1), I will develop a heuristic model that arises from the reading/viewing of Tarsila do Amaral's painting *Abaporu* and Oswald de Andrade's "Anthropophagite Manifesto," which I will dub 'emblematics.'

larger and institutional discursive ensembles only remotely, against the grain, or in a disfiguring way. To put it another way: at this level, absolutely anything goes - any ideology, or even religion will do, even the most archaic: all that matters is that it be used as the raw material of existence (ibid.).

This contrasts with the static, repeatable model that can be inserted and ‘applied’ to multiple contexts without being affected by that context, thereby treating what it sees and reads as ‘exemplary’ within the strict confines of what the model allows to become visible/legible. To use Jacques Rancière’s terminology, the standard understanding of the model can be seen as a ‘leftover’ of the ‘representative regime’: the generality of the model subsumes the particularity of what it models by making visible/legible only one, consistently ‘discovered’ detail (resulting in a sort of visual-verbal *Fort-Da* game).²¹⁰ The classical model will always show the same trait, the same aspect the ‘modeled’ is asked to illustrate.²¹¹ It effects a tautological, ‘monocular’ visibility, so to speak.

According to Guattari, structuralist theory operates on such a classical, ‘representative’ image of the model in which every particular case is but the variation of a universal law-like regularity. Structuralist topology (e.g. the distribution of signifiers and signifieds along the static axes of the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic, without ever seriously questioning the integrity of the paradigmatic/syntagmatic boundary) keeps

²¹⁰ For an exposition and critique of Rancière’s conceptual model, see the General Introduction.

²¹¹ Incidentally, this is precisely what the theory of *grafismo* is: a classical model that presumes a one-to-one relation between the general and the particular. The individual pictogram can only be particular to the extent that it testifies to the truth of the trait that the general has preselected. Generally speaking, constructive universalism is a static, representational model that always instantiates the ideology of purity. I discuss constructive universalism’s ‘rhetoric of purity’ (Cheetham 1991) in Chapter 1 (1.1), whereas in Chapter 2 I show how the power of the artworks’ aesthesis unhinges this model of subsumption. Furthermore, Jacques Derrida (1987) has highlighted the fetishism that underlies the logic of the example, which the classic model expresses, through its elevation of the detail as bespeaking the whole truth. He interrogates the fetishist logic of the detail and example in Martin Heidegger’s choice (though never mentioning the painting by name) of Van Gogh’s *A Pair of Shoes* (1885) - the shoe as the psychoanalytic fetish par excellence - in “The Origin of the Work of Art” (cf. Heidegger 1978, 143-212; for Derrida’s ‘detailed’ reading, see Derrida 1987, 325ff). As Ulmer notes, Derrida shows how fetishism is at work in academia, where “the example functions in the manner of a fetish,” revealing how “desire is active in scholarship at the level of the example” (Ulmer 1985, 323 n11). For my discussion of *grafismo* and its ‘fetishistic’ tabulations of pictograms, see Chapter 2 (2.2 and 2.3).

finding itself instantiated, which strengthens the self-image of structural integrity, and the (rhetorical) power accorded to topological distributions. Such structures and topologies are regimes of legibility that can only make visible what can be accommodated by the fixed contours of its grids or Borromean knottings. Generally speaking, theories that define their terms in advance only to fill those out by suitable instances – in other words, by subsuming the sensory field under the ‘guidelines’ of a conceptual infrastructure – can only make the image appear as already remoulded in conformity to the dictates of its discourse. In short, the visual can only appear under the logic of illustration: it is only allowed to show what the theory has already circumscribed in advance. The diagram, as situational ‘drawing,’ cannot be made general or universalizable without deforming what it claims to explain after its own image. The diagram, in the words of Guattari, “will be easily disassembled, connectable, reversible, subject to constant modification” (qtd. in Watson 2009, 11).

Diagrammatic thought takes each instance – say, a work of art – as its own model, as having paradigmatic force in and of itself, and having the capacity of upsetting previous models while reframing itself through its own self-modelling. It is to approach the image as a meta-model already working out its own enigmas from within itself, while operating in tandem with the regimes of legibility/visibility of the interpreter. This interminable, dialogical interplay between the immanence of the work and the interpretive horizon of the viewer/reader engenders a dynamic seesawing of formulation and reformulation, of moments of discernibility. What occurs does not follow any static image of structure, but arises from a constitutively unstable flow of structuring and re-structuring, constantly creating and dissolving ‘structures’ of its own devising, involving short instances of gatherings into “momentary snapshots,” as opposed to “still images” ‘illustrating’ some ready-made theoretical model (ibid.). In my reading, diagrammatic thinking is essentially visual and follows the (anarchic) flow of visual analogies and associations. Nevertheless, this centrifugal drift is not gratuitous; it is animated by historico-political frames of legibility and conceptual ‘anchors.’

Guattari broaches the indiscernibility of the model and what it models, the rapprochement of the generality of the model and the particularity of the phenomenon, in

terms of ‘automodelization,’ and ‘micro-structuration.’ The latter stand in contrast to the promise of the universal he sees as characteristic of the psychoanalytic approach, whose model claims validity for the macro-level: it claims to be valid beyond the particular case. As Guattari formulates his methodological concern in an interview,²¹²

Nothing was further from my intention than to propose a psycho-social model with the pretention of offering it as a global alternative to existing methods of analyzing the unconscious! Since that time my reflection has had as its axis problems of what I call *metamodelization*. That is, it has concerned something that does not found itself as an overcoding of existing modelizations, but more as a procedure of ‘automodelization,’ which appropriates all or part of existing models in order to construct its own cartographies, its own reference points, and thus its own analytic approach, its own analytic methodology (Guattari 1996, 122; italics in original).

Any model can be retrofitted in the creation of different ones, according to what the particularity of the case demands. Each instance gives rise to its own methodology, which the model works out. The diagrammatical model is *situational*; its composition depends on the contingency of what presents itself to the reading and viewing eye. The situational auto-model produces legibilities and visibilities in conjunction with the phenomenon it intends to ‘read’ and make visible. The point is not to detect ‘symptoms’ and read them back into the model, to give them a proper place within the structure, even if it is to show how meaning fails, again and again. What matters is that situational a-semiosis forces a rethinking of the model, of how it fails to take heed of certain elements: it is the blind spots in the makeup that necessitate rethinking, remodelling. I am belabouring this point because it is so important in my investigation, as a methodological principle: the work of art is that which prompts its own model to think with. It “construct[s] its own cartographies” by the appropriation of “all or part of existing models” (ibid.): it thus involves histories (and the colonality) of previous, ‘existing’ regimes of legibility.²¹³ This ‘cartography’ is the spirit of the work of art, as Adorno understands it: the artwork is

²¹² “Institutional Practice and Politics: An Interview by Jacques Pain,” in Guattari 1996, 121-38.

²¹³ Incidentally, the notion of cartography refers back to Torres-García’s *Inverted Map*. As I have tried to demonstrate in Chapter 3 (3.2 in particular), the *Inverted Map* produces a hermeneutic ‘automodelization’ which I have termed *mestizaje*: the superposition of different regimes of legibility and visibilities the map makes visible so as to question the structure of legibility imposed by the static, classical model of constructive universalism (informed as it is by the ‘rhetoric of purity’).

the prompting of legibilities (its ‘models’), so as to think its moment of a-semiosis, of the under-determination of aesthesis, which is its resistance to (and dynamization of) hermeneutics. As Colette Soler states, combating the reductive reading of art through the model of symptomatology, “an enigma remains on the side of the existence of the work of art. This would even be a possible definition of the work in its relation to sense: it resists interpretation as much as it lends itself to interpretation” (Soler 1991, 214).²¹⁴ The enigma of the visual remains, and meta-models are ekphrastic circumscriptions of visual alterity, the latter animating the ‘life’ of an interminable automodelization that responds to the artwork’s ‘lending itself’ to interpretation.

The exhibit *Inverted Utopias* is so important in that it explicitly presents itself as a way of making Latin American art newly legible/visible by means of a diagrammatic openness. It formulates this explicitly by embracing Theodor Adorno’s notion of the ‘constellation.’²¹⁵ *Inverted Utopias* sees itself as contrapuntal articulation of Latin American art, as the possible instigator of a new paradigm with the aim of opening up new ways of thinking that go beyond the strictly conceptual, art historical infrastructure. It proposes a new figure of thought that is multi-temporal and multi-spatial. As paradigmatic not only of a rethinking of Latin American art, but art history as a whole, I take it as a possible clue in rethinking how art can be viewed in resistance to the all-pervasive logic of the example. It thus has implications that go much further than presenting us with a ‘local history.’ In fact, it sets out a path for a possible reconceptualization of a global art history, by showing how multiple perspectives complicate familiar historical narratives through engaging in visual-verbal experimentations and speculative readings. At the same time however, it poses an insurmountable problem. Despite its valorization of the notion of constellation, it holds

²¹⁴ Colette Soler, “Literature as Symptom,” in Ragland-Sullivan and Bracher 1991, 213-19.

²¹⁵ The exhibition *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* was organized in 2004 by the Houston Museum of Fine Arts. The 2004 exposition was in fact a new version of the previously organized *Heterotopías: Medio siglo sin-lugar: 1918-1968*, held at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid in 2000. It is not clear what prompted the name-change from the Foucauldian ‘heterotopia’ to ‘inverted utopia’ in the rerouting of the exhibit from Madrid to Houston, from Spanish to English, from the Old to the New World. For a consideration of the notion of ‘heterotopia’ with respect to Torres-García’s *Inverted Map*, see Chapter 1 (1.2). Cf. Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea, eds., *Heterotopías: Medio siglo sin-lugar: 1918-1968* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2000).

fast to a reading of *antropofagia* under the sign of *Aufhebung*. In the text that follows, I will show how *Inverted Utopias* falls back into the old proven model of ‘exemplarity,’ in that it takes a manifesto as the illustration of a philosophical term, i.e., sublation, the sovereignty of a term that was precisely counteracted by Adorno’s understanding of constellation.²¹⁶ Furthermore, the catalogue equally folds back into the logic of exemplification by treating its images as illustrations of its own discourse, as images that must submit to the force of rhetoric, making the notion of constellation into a farce.

The monumental and weighty compilation of critical texts and images entitled *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (2004, 586 pages) refers to the exposition curated by Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts (June 20 - September 12, 2004), bringing together over two hundred and fifty works by about seventy artists from all corners of Latin America. As Ramírez makes explicit in the introductory texts, the aim of the exhibition is to counter the effacement of the disruptive potential of the Latin American avant-garde and its typification as an epigone of the ‘authentic’ historical avant-gardes of, roughly speaking, the northern hemisphere (Ramírez 2004, 5). Indicative is the still widespread circulation of “reductive stereotypes” that fix the essence of South American art through “stale” entries such as “peripheral,” “derivative,” “exotic” and “outsider” (Ramírez and Olea 2004, xv). Thus, *Inverted Utopias*’s point of contention is a traditional Eurocentric art history that reterritorializes ‘southern’ art according to the constraints of the canon, holding that Latin American cultural production can only be conceived as a derivation of the original – it is something ‘quaint,’ a curiosity, but a curiosity that must fit preconceived templates. To the list of stereotypes compiled by Ramírez and Olea, one could add “political,” “baroque” – as indicative of excess – and that most inevitable of master-signifiers when discussing Latin American cultural, and especially literary production, namely the cliché of ‘magic realism.’ Furthermore, as Gerardo Mosquera ironically observes, the western cultural market stipulates how Latin-American art is to ‘behave’ along these stereotypes.

²¹⁶ For the most part, Olea and Ramírez are concerned with Adorno’s understanding of ‘constellation,’ as it pertains to non-identity and negative dialectics. For a short sketch of these concepts, and where Benjamin’s conception differs from Adorno’s see the following section, i.e., “The Constellation According to Benjamin and Adorno.”

Third World artists are constantly asked to display their identity, to be fantastic, to look like no one else or to look like Frida Kahlo. The relatively high prices achieved by Latin American art at the great auctions have been assigned to painters who satisfy the expectations of a more or less stereotyped Latin-Americanity, able to fulfil the new demand for exotism at the centre (Mosquera 1992, 39).

Inverted Utopias sets itself the task of helping to dislodge these old habits of thought. *Latin America*, *Latin American art* and the *Latin American avant-garde* thus figure as what Theodor Adorno calls “cover-concepts,” that is, “concepts that make crucial differences vanish,” pacifying the critical vigour of contradictions through the “technique of [the] logical subsumption for ideological purposes” (Adorno 1973, 152), ignoring social conditions and historic overdetermination. As the ‘now’ is indelibly marked by technologies that compress space and time and thereby impose a new episteme in which, as Ramírez (2004, 4) writes, the “concept of the ‘network’ [is] the privileged schema for material and symbolic operations at all levels of human activity,” the linear model of temporal progression towards a definite *telos* has become anachronistic. From the “privileged vantage point” (Ramírez and Olea 2004, xv) of a *now* that unveils the “tyranny of the market place” and “the positivist Darwinism of globalization,” (Ramírez 2004, 1) an alternative approach must be formulated in order to stop this lapse into uniformity. Incidentally, this overt cultural pessimism might be read as a hyperbolic extrapolation typical of the manifesto genre, as a way to ‘set up’ a polemic attack. It could be argued that Ramírez and Olea inflate the notion of ‘globalization’ to such an extent that it becomes a caricature, as if this social-economic transformation does not allow for its own sites of resistance. However, this allows Ramírez and Olea to formulate their antagonistic intervention. In keeping with Foucault’s thesis that the present era is one of juxtaposition, then, as Ramírez and Olea argue, the parameters of canonical art history have lost their relevance. To counter the obsolescence of the worn-out teleological model, both curators propose an organizing principle that allows for fluidity. Olea and Ramírez’s ‘manifestoes’ express the aspiration of making Latin American art legible in an innovative and relevant way, by “collect[ing] and recompose[ing] (to remember) its displaced and dismembered relics as elements in a genealogy of and for the present” (Preziosi 1998, 58). Their adaptation of Adorno’s constellatory model is

intended to recharge visuality with a timely ‘legibility,’ and through their conceptual ‘poaching,’ Ramírez and Olea infuse Theodor Adorno’s theoretical frame with a renewed topicality.

The Constellation According to Benjamin and Adorno

“Every idea is a sun and is related to other ideas just as suns are related to each other. The harmonious relationship between such essences is what constitutes truth,” writes Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1977, 37). From the outset, Benjamin defines truth as the motion between legibility and visibility, the music of the spheres sounding from the revolutions of suns, giving visibility its force, and language something to talk about. It is rhetoric that occasions the revolution of truth to become legible: the analogy, the discernment of likeness in alterity. The constellation, the sight of the starry sky above, is brought down into the writing of philosophy to become the effect of an analogy, of a legibility revolving around the mobile: “Its [the idea’s] significance can be illustrated with an analogy. Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars” (ibid., 34). This idea-constellation contains a universe; it is a monad, in turn rotating around other ideas, making for a complex dynamic. This monad has a task: it must rescue the particularity, the experiential ‘thickness’ of phenomena. For Benjamin, only philosophical reflection can do justice to the particularity of phenomena. The constellation is nothing less than the hope for the (bodily) resurrection of phenomena, of the affective, of appearances, of concrete experience. “Ideas are timeless constellations, and by virtue of the elements’ being seen as points in such constellations, phenomena are subdivided and at the same time redeemed (35).” In epistemology, idealist philosophy, and positivism,

the particular entered into the concept and disappeared. But in truth’s representation, the particulars, although conceptually mediated, reemerged in the idea; or more accurately, they became the idea in the conceptual arrangement of their elements (Buck-Morss 1977, 92).

By contrast, the constellation ensures the afterlife of the manifold of intuition. The radicality of Benjamin’s thought lies precisely in its engagement with the contingent world of phenomena, of the concrete. Paradoxically - or rather, fittingly - this redemption

of the sensory was effected through the inversion of the Platonic hierarchies of legibility. As Susan Buck-Morss points out, “when Benjamin treated the phenomenal elements as absolutes while viewing the ideas, and hence truth, as historically specific and changing, he was inverting the long-established Platonic conception” (1977, 93).

The constellation/idea circulates in a “tripartite” constellation (Rochlitz 1996, 41) of its own, implicated as it is in the flows of legibility Benjamin constructs between phenomenon, idea, and concept - names with a long-established philosophical cachet, but whose meanings he inverts (almost parodies, perhaps). The role of the concept is to act as mediator between the idea (truth, the general) and the phenomena (the experiential, the particular), thus in effect occupying a precarious space in-between.

Through their mediating role concepts enable phenomena to participate in the existence of ideas. It is this same mediating role which fits them for the other equally basic task of philosophy, the representation of ideas. As the salvation of phenomena by means of ideas takes place, so too does the representation of ideas through the medium of empirical reality (Benjamin 1977, 34).

There is a profound caesura, a productive discontinuity between ideas and phenomena, which ensures that the concept will always perform its labour, regulating and actually creating the flow and discontinuities between generality and particularity. The idea as constellation is self-enclosed, unveiling the deep cut between particularity and generality, their syncope and not their continuum.²¹⁷

phenomena are not incorporated in ideas. They are not contained in them. Ideas are, rather, their objective, virtual arrangement The idea thus belongs to a fundamentally different world from that which it apprehends. [Ideas] do not contribute to the knowledge of phenomena, and in no way can the latter be criteria with which to judge the existence of ideas. ... [I]deas come to life only when extremes are assembled around them.... It is the function of concepts to groups phenomena together, and the division which is brought about within them thanks to the distinguishing power of the intellect is all the more significant in that it brings about two things

²¹⁷ The same cut is operative in Benjamin’s theory of allegory. Fragments and ruins come together, in the constellation of a baroque play, to form an unstable and precarious whole whose signified is never assured, always internally dispersed. Benjamin frames this dispersion as a loss of an originary wholeness of meaning, which makes allegory (and modernism as the baroque’s true heir) such a melancholy formation. For more on this mournful conception of allegory, see Chapter 1 (1.2). For a discussion of the baroque, see the following chapter, especially 5.1.2.

at a single stroke: the salvation of phenomena and the representation of ideas (Benjamin 1977, 34-35).

Concepts are the salvation of the phenomenon by representing the idea-constellation. This means that a disquieting uncertainty inhabits the heart of truth: we cannot reach it as such; we only live in its borrowed, dying light. We cannot be sure of the ‘truth’ of the idea, only of its representation, its mediation by the concept, but we can never be certain of its ultimate being. The light of stars reaches our eyes now, but we cannot know whether what we are seeing has not already expired, calling out for resurrection. To reflect on this through concepts is already to redeem phenomena, in the hopes of bringing about truth, the hope that the constellation will continue to sound.

the mode of temporality of the idea is timelessness, the idea is out of time, yet it is within history, in the concept, and phenomenon. Ideas are timeless constellations, and by virtue of the elements’ being seen as points in such constellations, phenomena are subdivided and at the same time redeemed (Benjamin 1977, 34).

As Rainer Rochlitz maintains, “‘timelessness’ and ‘history’ are not contradictory terms for Benjamin” (Rochlitz 1996, 41). The time of the idea is indeterminate, non-dated, without beginning or end, while cultural forms and regimes of legibility and visibility are historical formations. The construction of the idea - a constellation is a drawing - demands the time of the phenomenon, since

in constructing ideas it was continuously necessary to return to the phenomena themselves, the more so as the ideas were not eternal but historically specific constellations. Hence philosophical description ‘begins anew with every idea’ (Buck-Morss 1977, 94).

Adorno values the notion of constellation for its immanent stance that takes heed of a particularity that is too often consumed by the fervour of totalitarian modes of thought. In its recognition of particularity, its method is immanent. Adorno takes up the notion of constellation from Benjamin, and makes it his own. For Adorno, as for Benjamin (but speaking in a different register now), truth - the ‘immanent’ concern of thought - is a matter of aesthesis, of the concrete resistance of things, which demands an engagement with a-semiosis, as that which resists subsumption – or rather, it shows its irredeemable

violence. Truth is material, it must be expressed, assume form, so as to occasion further thought in an infinite unfolding of materiality: the spirit of the aesthetic.²¹⁸

To unlock the power of the non-identical, to break through the deadlock of the narcissistic logic of the example that only thinks itself through itself, the constellation is necessary. Indeed, for Adorno “the idea of classification which subsumes the particular as example does not open it up; this can be done only by the constellation of concepts that the constructive mind brings to bear on it” (Adorno 2008, 136). Negative dialectics, as thought, reaches out to the non-existent, to utopia. The task of negative dialectics is to think the non-existent, the not-yet, right in the midst of being, taking actuality as its concrete stand and give shape to utopia.

Utopia is blocked off by possibility, never by immediate reality; this is why it seems abstract in the midst of extant things. The inextinguishable color comes from nonbeing. Thought is its servant, a piece of existence extending - however negatively - to that which is not. The utmost distance alone would be proximity; philosophy is the prism in which its color is caught (Adorno 1973, 57).

Against identity-thinking, i.e., the conviction that visibility and legibility coincide or at least stand in a unilateral, transparent relation, the constellation opens up the negative as the locus where true utopian energies dwell. Negative dialectics, through the force of the constellation, tries to pry open the hard shell of the world, and think it, in all its opacity. It must make visible and legible, through words, the “history congealed in things” (ibid., 52), their self-difference, the manifold strata of historical existence and meanings. Negative dialectics is simultaneously the necessity to face the gap between word and thing, the utopia (non-space) occupied by the idea that cannot be captured in a positive formula.

The means employed in negative dialectics for the penetration of its hardened objects is possibility - the possibility of which their reality has cheated the objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one. But no matter how hard we try for linguistic expression of such a history congealed in things, the words we use will remain concepts. Their precision

²¹⁸ For an account of Adorno’s paradoxical materialist notion of the ‘spirit of the work of art,’ see Chapter 1 (1.1.)

substitutes for the thing itself, without quite bringing its selfhood to mind; there is a gap between words and the thing they conjure (ibid., 52-53).

Concepts, in isolation, are not enough to address and do justice to the particular, to the thickness of experience that must find its way into words. The concept's 'flaw,' its partiality, is at the same time its strength, since new distributions of visibilities/legibilities will emerge in their juxtaposition.

The determinable flaw in every concept makes it necessary to cite others; this is the font of the only constellations which inherited some of the hope of the name. The language of philosophy approaches that name by denying it. The claim of immediate truth for which it chides the words is almost always the ideology of a positive, existent identity of word and thing (ibid., 53).

To a certain extent, identity-thinking harbours a mystic core, as if with naming one could conjure presence, and resurrect a lost world of fullness, an Edenic world where naming is the sovereign calling forth of being. This is what Adorno discerns in Benjamin: the mystic residue translated in a positive dialectic that takes the name as a way back into fullness (cf. Adorno 1973, 53).

The difference in conception between Benjamin's and Adorno's constellation revolves around the notion of redemption, which receives a divergent legibility differentiating both thinkers. Redemption, for Benjamin, has an explicitly religious meaning, while for Adorno it involves the recuperation of terms, philosophical concepts, with a view to make them newly legible. Adorno will strip the religious, mystic connotation of Benjamin's constellation and reorient its meaning towards a different regime of legibility, i.e., Marxian theory, and its liberatory nexus through material rather than ideational redistributions. Specifically, Adorno translated Benjamin's mystic constellation into a "dialectical,' 'materialist' one ... by 'refunctioning' it with the aid of Marxist theory: now the idea, the 'essence' of a phenomenon, was its historically specific *social* content (Buck-Morss 1977, 95; emphasis in original). Through this reconfigured legibility, Adorno redeems the 'constellation' for negative dialectics.

The notion of ‘constellation,’ as embedded within Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics*, and as it is taken up by Ramírez and Olea, can be read as a generative principle that opens up new avenues of thought, as a way of entering uncharted terrain continuously spreading out through the dialectic interplay of opposites. The main tenet of negative dialectics is that the negation of a negative does not produce a positive, which Adorno characterizes as the oppressive essence of the philosophical tradition from Plato onwards. In Adorno’s view, the quest for truth, conceived as a positive valuation, obscures its own procedure of knowledge production (the *modus operandi*), and the violence this operation implies.²¹⁹ Philosophy has failed to reflect on its own totalitarian/architectonic aspirations, that is to say, it can only conceive of difference under the rubric of sameness or identity. Thus, traditional philosophy has been nothing but the omission of that which cannot be captured within a pre-conceived totality, founded on the pasteurization of opposites by robbing them of their critical potential. The opposites in such systems of thought are not truly opposites, as the truth is known in advance, and the dialectical schema is a mere justification of a supposed epiphany (cf. Adorno 1973, 3-40). With Hegel, the master-architect of triadic abstraction, the system found its aporetic apogee, in his attempt to simultaneously preserve negativity and positivity within a third term through the sublation or *Aufhebung* of the two opposites. According to Adorno, this process already revealed the cracks within its holistic foundations in its obsession with the reconciliation of contradictions, and the exclusion of what could destabilize these gestures of subsumption (cf. Adorno 1973, 3-13). Symptomatic of this repression is that the “history [of philosophy] shows amazingly few indications of the sufferings of humankind” (ibid., 153), as it tends to omit the non-conceptual sensory field.

Concepts coming forth from such a unifying perspective are but “congealed syntheses,” expounded by philosophers as “partisans of unity” animated by the “horror of the diffuse” (ibid., 158), erecting concepts whose “immanent claim is its order-creating invariance as against the change in what it covers” (ibid., 153). In short, traditional

²¹⁹ For more on Hubert Damisch’s distinction between *modus operandi* and *modus significandi*, see Chapter 2 (2.2), where I show how Torres-García represses a consideration of *poiesis* in order to present constructive universalism as a transparent vehicle for cosmic signification.

philosophy is the trafficking in “fetish concepts,” concealing epistemic labour and the entwinement in a “non-conceptual whole” (ibid., 12). By contrast, negative dialectics “extinguishes the autarky of the concept,” and gives voice to aspects that do not fit within a whole, and focuses on what remains unresolved, or what resists epitomization: aisthesis. Furthermore, in the words of Adorno, negative dialectics is a protest, a “refusal to lend itself to sanctioning things as they are,” (ibid., 159) it is an attempt “to substitute for the unity principle, the idea of what would be outside the sway of such unity” (ibid., xx). Against the dictates of identity-thinking and correspondence theories which stipulate the coincidence of the ‘is’ and the ‘ought’ – of identifying ‘things as they are,’ the ‘state of affairs,’ with the way things ought to be, are supposed to be, forever – the constellation harbours the utopian force of negative dialectics.

4.2 The Curatorial Articulation

A similar negation of unity supports Ramírez’s and Olea’s curatorial articulation. The point of departure for the formulation of an alternative to traditional art history is the emphasis on the indeterminacy and instability of the notion of ‘art.’ Hector Olea concurs with Theodor Adorno’s statement that “[t]he concept of art is located in a historically changing constellation of elements; it refuses definition” (qtd. in Olea 2004, 443). In order to approximate the principles of constellation, Ramírez and Olea use astronomy as their pedagogical tool, as a way to explore the density and centrifugal tendencies of their organizing principle. More precisely, they both start from the Hubble’s high-definition photographs (Figure 4.1), and how images of distant star systems set in motion thought processes that have an impact on our own “trifling terrestrial vantage point” (ibid.)



Figure 4.1 “Countless stars jostle around the constellation of Musca in a densely populated area of our galaxy” (Ramírez 2004, 1). [Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea, eds. *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*. (Houston: Yale University Press in association with Museum of Fine Arts, 2004), frontispiece].

The images themselves are already the effects of abstraction as process, in that the *given-to-view* is restricted to the registration of light particles, or photons. Such is the constraint of photography, in that as a system of representation it already delimits and fixes reality according to a parameter. However, while the speed of light may limit our view, it also provides us with traces of a past, a “reality well beyond our reach,” comprising, as Hector Olea so eloquently phrases it, “million-years light igniting its heated briefness in the dark infinite” (443). No matter how high its definition, the photograph already comes with an ordering principle – a determinate visibility – and teasing out the light emitted from concepts is yet a further step in the process, resulting in an atomic schema of concepts, while discarding the fuzziness of “super-dense matter” and “masses of gas” that flee our grasp (ibid.). The metaphor of interstellar observation catalyzes how we can do justice to the elusiveness of concepts as they are ‘provoked’ into ‘perception.’

The virtue of Adorno’s constellatory model then becomes apparent in its appropriation by Olea and Ramírez. It is sensitive to what happens in-between ideas, in-

between the ‘stars-dots’ so to speak, and those faint or, ‘dark dots’ in the process of traveling to the Hubble lens which, for the time being at least, escape our view. Our vantage point in space and time compels us to ‘connect the dots’ and discern patterns, while acknowledging that there is no guarantee that what we are able to see on the photograph and distil from it actually corresponds to a truth-idea.

However, as I will argue, it is precisely the congealing of history in the juxtaposition of images – of abstraction as process – that *Inverted Utopias* is strangely blind to. Instead, it performs a logical operation informed by the notion of abstraction as process, and loses its historical claims by doing so. The exhibit takes the notion of constellation too literal, and reduces it to the operations of a logical field. It is transfixed by the magic of syllogistic logic of abstraction as process that the star model conjures up, right before one’s eyes so to speak. Instead of employing the constellation as a theoretical diagram, *Inverted Utopias* frames the constellation as just another model, a new sovereign structure. In wanting to explore the disruptive, diagrammatic potential of the constellation it merely ends up replicating a conceptual edifice that takes itself as primary, relegating the status of the image to that of an ‘understudy.’ The catalogue pictures are only particular to the extent that they ‘illustrate’ the concept of ‘constellation.’ The logic of the text, with its investment in ‘disruption,’ ‘a-chronology,’ ‘multiplicity,’ is counteracted by the narrative suggested by the imagetext. The latter ends up framing the images as ‘examples’ of the terms favoured by the logical field of the discourse it is anchored by.

The literalization and the fixing of the constellation diagram into a static model through the narrative logic of abstraction as process, as captured in a final, synoptic schema (Figure 4.2) – truly a caricature of the diagrammatic potential of the constellation – evacuates all critical potential and makes *Inverted Utopias* into a self-parody, the simulation, the token image of a critical stance.

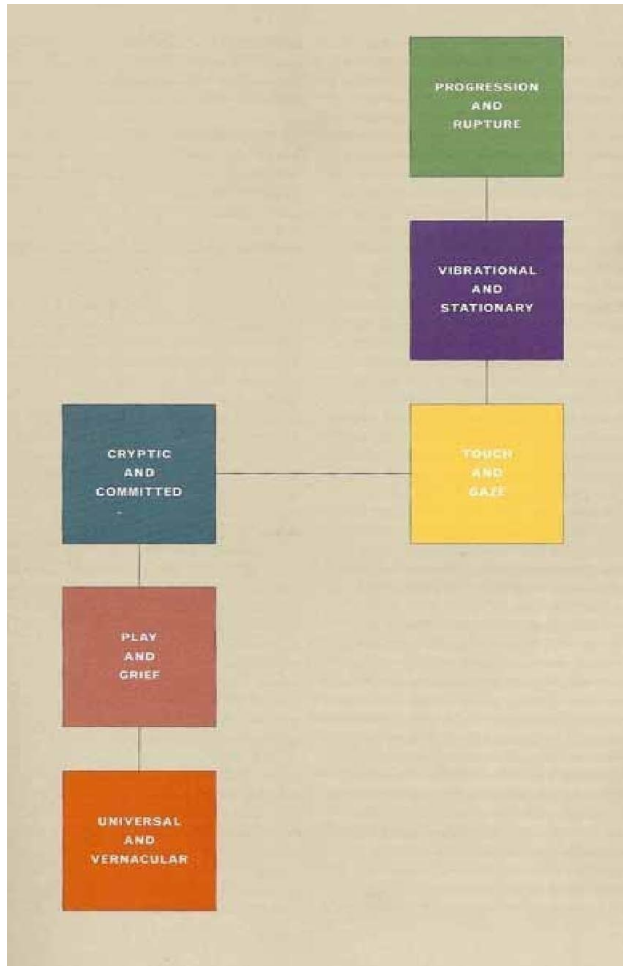


Figure 4.2 Constellation schema of the ‘curatorial articulation’ of the *Inverted Utopias* exhibit. [Ramírez and Olea 2004, 6].

The six clusters or ‘constellations’ of *Inverted Utopias* are said to be able to function autonomously, while their juxtaposition simultaneously effects links through the interpretative labour of the viewer, or rather this is what Ramírez and Olea expect from their *ideal* viewers and readers. This corresponds to Adorno’s understanding that art is, to recall Leonardo da Vinci’s phrase, a *mental thing (una cosa mentale)* – not only for the artist, but above all for the viewer. Within Adorno’s Marxist framework, art reminds the viewer – with the help of negative dialectics – that a genuine interaction with objects remains a possibility located in some future, holding the promise of a change in consciousness. However, the central paradox is that the utopian aspect of art precisely resides in its fetish character, which Adorno, in *Aesthetic Theory* (1997), characterizes as its claim to autonomy, as if art would obey only its own immanent laws, pretending to be

impervious to alienation and commodification. To put things differently, with the advent of modernity (and capitalist industrialization) the autonomization of art and aesthetics was set in motion, a process that Adorno sees as the fetishist core of aesthetics. Paradoxically, it is this fetish character of art that grinds against that which would divest it from its promise of liberation and a de-alienated engagement with objects: art shows what a de-alienated engagement with things and people could look like.

Hence, the dream that art poses is one of liberation in terms of a true relation to objects, in which the object would be respected as a *thing-in-itself*, and not a *thing-for-another*, that is to say, an object that only receives significance through its market circulation and attached exchange value. This would be exemplary for an authentic relation to the other. However, Adorno's conception of art constrained by the Marxist emancipatory model lends itself to deconstruction, and I believe this is what Hector Olea and Mari Carmen Ramírez intuit by emphasizing the disruptive potential of the constellatory model. The constellations within the exhibition are made up of two concepts in a dialectical tension ('touch' *and* 'gaze,' 'cryptic' *and* 'committed,' and so on) producing ephemeral crystallizations of effects of meaning, as the constellation itself stands in relation with the other constellations, which have their own inner dynamics. This means that the productive force of the constellatory model is potentially infinite, that through the workings of time and space new dialectic relations emerge, and, to quote Ramírez, "traversed by these multiple levels of apprehension and infinite readings, *Inverted Utopias* takes place" (Ramírez 2004, 7). This seems to echo Adorno's insistence on art as something non-discursive yet cognitive, with the ability of prying open new ways of understanding, but it gives *Negative Dialectics* an inflection loosening its explicitly Marxist utopian aspirations, which determined the stakes in advance.

Moreover, the notion of 'taking place,' as implying some sort of intervention, signals the difference between inverted utopias and heterotopias. The act of inversion unlocks utopian potential in that, by reversing the homological hierarchies in such binaries as *centre versus periphery*, *North versus South* and so on, it highlights oppositionality, and makes one conscious of the contradictory tensions that preclude resolution. As such, rather than being a definable concept that can be grasped positively,

inverted utopia is a name for an elusive *modus operandi*, a way of doing, that attempts to disconnect itself from the assignation of a definite time and space.²²⁰ In other words, it refers to how a negative dialectics might operate. In this way, it differs from the notion of *heterotopia*, which, as a conceptual tool, assigns a function to historical and concrete spaces, as in the example Foucault (1986) gives of colonial Paraguay, which, at a certain moment in history, functioned as a compensatory locus for the West (cf. Foucault 1986, 27).

Thus, the constellatory model as informed by the notion of ‘inverted utopia,’ ascertains how different artists – removed in time and space – attempted to come to terms with the same oppositions in their artistic praxis, without reaching reconciliation, or perhaps only an imaginary one. The exorcism of synthesis is hinted at by Olea’s and Ramírez’s employment of the indeterminate conjunction *and*, as in *Universal and Vernacular, Progression and Rupture, Vibrational and Stationary, Touch and Gaze, Cryptic and Committed, Play and Grief*. In his comment on Deleuze and Guattari’s tactics of the in-between, Paul Patton observes that the word *and* “comes to stand for that which is in-between any two things brought into relation with each other. ‘And’ is always a border between two elements and, as such, a potential line of flight along which things happen and changes take place” (Patton 2000, 10). In this vein, the *and* gives voice to what happens in-between ideas, and this is what Olea and Ramírez thematize through their juxtapositions which bring forth multiple versions of the ‘South.’²²¹

²²⁰ For more on *modus operandi*, see Chapter 2 (2.2).

²²¹ The ‘and’ that creates the space in-between words in their confrontation is close to Adorno’s paratactic praxis that creates meaning-effects that go beyond the logical field of the text. Parataxis engenders an image of the truth in writing that arises immanently, through the organization and recombinations of word-atoms clashing into moveable, new compounds. For a detailed discussion of Adorno’s paratactic *modus operandi*, see Savage 2005, 281-295.

4.3 From Diagram to Model: The Reversion of *Inverted Utopias*

Lacking the ‘experience’ of the actual exhibition *Inverted Utopias*, I can only turn to its archive, as the sedimentation of a past event. The catalogue and its ordering principle can be set against the intentions of the curators as expressed in their theoretical discourse. As such, the catalogue of *Inverted Utopias* can be read as an instance of a scriptural-pictorial economy, but one that makes conscious the contradictions inherent in its own operation. Overall, there seems to be a tension between authorial intention and the inherent constraints of the publication format. What is at stake here is not whether or not the catalogue lives up to its aim, but how the archivization of an exhibit into a textual-pictorial publication complicates the ‘openness’ of the constellatory model. Although set up in contradistinction to “methodological caricatures” that feign comprehensiveness through the imposition of a strictly “linear focus” that subsumes preceding *-isms* into a holistic art history (cf. Ramírez 2004, 5), the catalogue of *Inverted Utopias* cannot but obey a certain degree of linearity. The ostensibly innocent procedures of page numbering, or the concrete placing of photographic reproductions of the actual works attest to the latter. Furthermore, through their definite positioning, the six constellations, rather than standing in a contradictory relation, can be read as thematic rubrics, as captions ‘anchoring’ the images, thus creating the impression that we are dealing with a variant of classification (Figure 4.2).

The logic of illustration thus comes back to haunt the theoretical aim of *Inverted Utopias*. The catalogue, as imagetext, re-inverts a critical stance back into the fold of the structural model through the fixing - the *ancrage* - of images through the master signifier of ‘constellation,’ an operation it set out to deconstruct. I am invoking Roland Barthes's distinction in “The Rhetoric of the Image” (1977) between ‘relais’ and ‘ancrage,’ as the functions words can assume in relation to an image. Images never function in isolation; the verbal either anchors (the operation of *ancrage*) the image or complements the image as relay (*relais*), in which the word supports the visual. The concept of *anchorage* signals the word’s function as ‘ground’ for the image’s orientation and interpretation, forcing the image to assume a definite interpretative horizon. Seen as ‘anchor,’ the word

territorializes the image, which is precisely what the six - or twelve when taking into account their duplicate structure - names for the constellations do. The labels provided by *Inverted Utopias* combat the polysemy of the images, the ‘terror’ of their uncertainty. To quote Barthes,

All images are polysemous. Polysemy poses a question of meaning and this question always comes through as a dysfunction. Thus, in every society various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs; the linguistic message is one of these techniques. Anchorage may be ideological and indeed this is its principal function; the text *directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle *dispatching*, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance. With respect to the liberty of the signifieds of the image, the text has thus a *repressive* value” (Barthes 1977, 37; emphasis in original).

It seems that, through the constraint of the catalogue format and through the images’ association with one (or more) of the constellations, the latter somehow functioning as ‘captions,’ *Inverted Utopias* ultimately tends towards an ‘anchored’ reading. It runs counter to a true constellatory diagrammatics that would take serious the tensions between image and text as well as the image’s structural opposition to capture through its work of aesthesis. Despite Ramírez’s and Olea’s insistence, the couples of each constellation can still be read as themes somehow merged in the work of the artists enumerated under their respective constellatory subheadings. All in all, it seems that the catalogue stages a new contradiction through the interplay of linearity and constellation, as a new dialectical configuration, in which the term constellation is to be understood in terms of trans-linearity, web, parallel, nexus, and juxtaposition, while linearity connotes hierarchy and as such addresses the material constraints of the publication format.

In the end however, the publication cannot but submit to the logic of linearization. Furthermore, it is not merely the effect of the ‘law’ of the culture of the book and the privileging of glottography attendant upon the medium. The problem runs deeper. The notion of ‘constellation’ is inserted within a restricted economy of visibility, in which ‘constellation’ is framed as a more or less transparent regime of visibility making its images legible as ‘illustrations,’ thus robbing the works of art of their potential to

contradict this imposition of ‘exemplarity.’ The anarchic power of juxtaposition, anachronism, multiple vantage points, and associations across space-time are brought back under the fixed image, the canonical notion of conceptuality as a term allowing for universalizability and subsumption of particulars. ‘Constellation’ becomes legible as a monological, fixed concept. Constellation comes to function as ‘anchor,’ fixing the images in place, making them legible as illustrations of a concept that was initially intended to break through the autarky of the concept. The potential for disequilibrium of the ‘anti-concept’ of constellation is eventually contained by its reconceptualization under the familiar plot-line of abstraction as process. This reconceptualization of an ‘anti-concept’ as paradigm of a certain understanding of conceptuality – its becoming-concept instead of the hoped-for function of productive disorientation against conceptual rigidity – is presented as the result of abstraction. That is to say, the book grounds a narrative that progressively moves from the inchoate – the opacity of the Milky Way being the model and starting point for the constellatory approach of the exhibit, its ‘origin’ so to speak – to the articulate, to the universalizable. What the book omits is that the idea of constellation is not concerned with the tracing of an ‘origin,’ but instead reveals a hypotactic ‘snapshot’ of a process long since past, which only now has found the time to insinuate itself into the present as an unexpected after-effect. This, indeed, is the crux. The way ‘constellation’ is presented in *Inverted Utopias* heeds the narrative plot underlying the notion of abstraction as process, thereby vitiating the attempt at complexity and historicity the notion of ‘constellation’ was intended to convey: it is reduced to being merely one ‘cover concept’ amongst so many others.

Inverted Utopias replicates the de-historicizing logic and idealizing narrative ploy of Theo van Doesburg’s *Ästhetische Transfiguration eines Gegenstandes*. The latter intends to make abstraction intelligible as telos and ‘terminus.’ It is presented as the end-result having moved from the opaque sensory field of naturalism and the anarchy of resemblance to the purity, transparency, and autarky of the two-dimensional surface as plane of the Idea – of intelligibility pure and simple. Van Doesburg’s *Ästhetische Transfiguration Eines Gegenstandes* (1917; *An Object Aesthetically Transformed*, included in his book *Principles of Neoplastic Art* (1925), has a clear pedagogical intent (Figure 4.3).

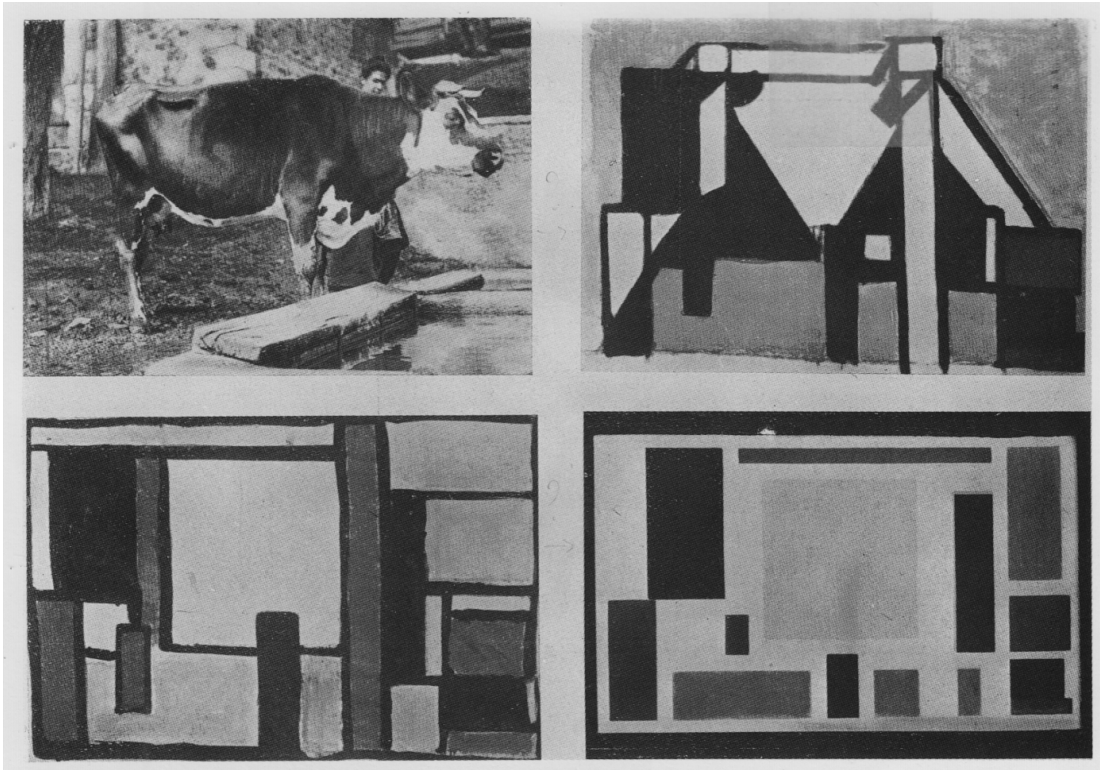


Figure 4.3 Theo van Doesburg, *Ästhetische Transfiguration Eines Gegenstandes*, c. 1917. Print reproduced from *Grundbegriffe der Neuen Gestaltenden Kunst (Principles of Neoplastic Art)*, 1925. Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin. [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/80/Grundbegriffe_der_neuen_gestaltenden_Kunst_ill_5-8.jpg]

To make the principles of Neoplastic art legible, Van Doesburg produces a logical field – a narrative, discursive field – through montage.²²² In Roland Barthes's terminology, it relies on the operation of 'relay,' in which the blank spaces between frames take on the function of instituting a temporal sequence, making the series legible as a linguistic statement. This strategy echoes the operating principles of visual narrative media that derive their force through the gathering of discrete images into a narrative whole, such as photo novels and comics, or Eadweard Muybridge's experiments in the

²²² This procedure echoes Torres-García's tabulation of pictorial signs in his theory of grafismo, which is equally concerned in setting up a regime of legibility that creates the logical field, by means of the same narrative logic of abstraction, where the 'rhetoric of purity' can take hold. For more on the theory of grafismo, see Chapter 2 (2.2). For a discussion of Mark Cheetham's notion of the "rhetoric of purity" (Cheetham 1991) of abstraction, see Chapter 1 (1.1).

transposition of temporality through the photographic capture of motion, where the blanks in-between the frames signify time and causality, and where the reading eye moves so as to reconstitute the original time-image in its full presence.²²³ In the case of Van Doesburg's *Ästhetische Transfiguration*, legibility is the effect of a specific arrangement of visibility which endows the juxtaposition with a certain necessity, making it transparently legible through its association with the laws of cause and effect, of before and after, in a notation/documenting of rhythmicity. Furthermore, the sheer act of sequencing allows for the reconstruction of intentions and meanings, as the montage-surface becomes the screen for the imaging of a necessary causal chain located in the agency of the artist who presents us with this programmatic image of his praxis. Van Doesburg's visual juxtaposition involves a complex relay of reconstructions demanded from the viewer as he/she is positioned to decipher the opening image through the canon of naturalistic representation. What gives Van Doesburg's montage such rhetorical force is precisely the 'code' of the first image with its almost photographic realism, with this painted snapshot of a specific cow at a specific trough, with the face of a specific milkmaid peering over the animal's neck, with all the connotations of the iconic it comes with. The realist cow, as the model of iconic referencing to the world, constitutes the point of 'origin' in the progressive construction - framed as a process of simplification - of an image of art that does away with referentiality altogether. At the same time, an image of intentionality is sequentially composed that is read back into the visual montage by a reader/observer positioned so as to re-enact this strange genesis – the 'aesthetic transfiguration' (*Ästhetische Transfiguration*) that Van Doesburg gives as caption for the composition – through a specific anchoring of the visual juxtaposition. Charles Harrison highlights the interdependence of legibility and visibility in the reconstruction of Van Doesburg's pedagogy of the abstract as the attempt to confer intelligibility through the category of causality:

In the encounter with traditional forms of painting, we are accustomed to being able to match certain images against the world, to noticing where they do and do not correspond with appearances and to reading kinds of intention into the resulting similarities and differences.

²²³ For an extensive treatment of temporality and sequentiality through the juxtaposition of images - as well as considerations pertaining to Eadweard Muybridge's photographic experiments - see *Time, Narrative and the Fixed Image*, edited by Mireille Ribière and Jan Baetens (2001).

Given the sequence of Van Doesburg's illustrations, we can actually engage in a similar form of matching. If we are apprised of the intervening stages, we can easily enough 'read' the abstract painting as referring to the cow. This is to say that we can reconstruct a kind of causal history for the painting, one which commences on the one hand with some actual cow in the world and on the other with some set of intentions on the part of the artist. The process of abstraction is, as it were, the sequence of effects that these intentions have on the 'original' image of the cow, and the final 'abstract' composition is the result. To see the composition as referring to the cow, then, is implicitly to reconstruct a chain of causes, intentions and effects (Harrison in Harrison, Frascina and Perry 1994, 195).

The narrative logic implied by the juxtaposition of paintings is that of abstraction as process. The story of abstraction becomes legible as comprising different stages of de-naturalization along a progression, a teleology of purification.²²⁴ The images are progressively cleansed of their naturalistic excess, with *Composition VIII (The Cow)* (Figure 4.4) as the denouement, the *pointe*: pure primary colour planes, horizontals and verticals, white space.

²²⁴ This of course brings us to Cheetham's 'rhetoric of purity' (cf. Chapter 1, 1.1) which not only seems to function on the level of discourse but, more importantly, involves the 'distribution of the sensible' (cf. Rancière) as it relates to the creation of a regime of visibility. The relation between reading and viewing that Van Doesburg prescribes makes it possible, at least within the confines of the 'sensitivity of purity,' to 'see' how abstraction works according to his conception of it. All other possible perceptions of the work are excluded as irrelevant, as they do not subscribe to the legibility/visibility of purity demanded. For a recap of Rancière's theoretical stance, see the General Introduction.

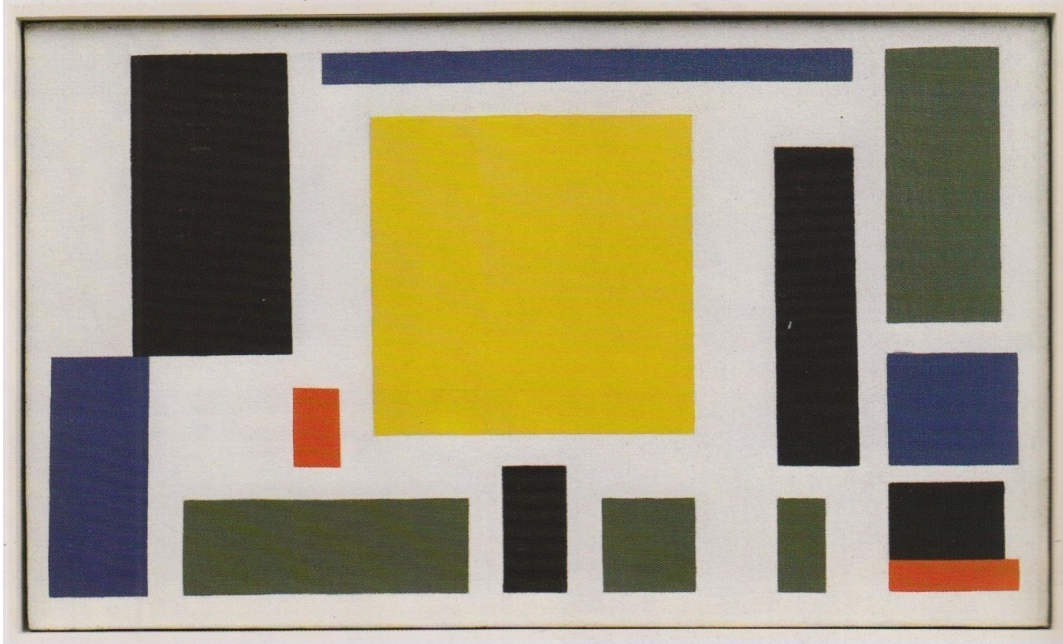


Figure 4.4 Theo van Doesburg, *Composition VIII (The Cow)*, oil on canvas, c.1917, 38 x 64 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

[http://www.moma.org/collection_images/resized/371/w500h420/CRI_242371.jpg]

The image sequence starts with the particular and iconic only to culminate in the image of the universal and aniconic. Furthermore, the regime of legibility Van Doesburg intends as *modus significandi* must be read as Neo-Plasticism's *modus operandi*, the same identification that was demanded by Joaquín Torres-García's theoretical constructs (see Part 1). The coincidence of the two constitutes a rhetorical operation, in which the images become propositions in the logical exposition signalled by the title. This title - comparable to a caption in a comic - effectively anchors the image-montage as the 'aesthetic transfiguration of an object' (*Ästhetische Transfiguration Eines Gegenstandes*), giving us the 'correct' guideline through which we are to make sense of the sequencing. If Van Doesburg's composite image is to take on its status as an instructional image 'exemplifying' the principles of his new art - a 'how to' for abstract art - as indicated by the book's title, then what it presupposes is a 'theoretical eye' willing to suspend the haecceity²²⁵ of the individual paintings and favour their linearization and subsumption

²²⁵ For brief accounts of the concept of haecceity in the context of the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987; 1994), see the General Introduction as well as Chapter 1 (1.2). I approach Torres-García's *Inverted Map* as

within the narrative ‘transmutation’ from naturalist object to pure plastic plane. The logical field hinges on the positioning of a reader, and not a viewer. That is to say, the theoretical eye is constituted through the following of the sequence through into its final image, thereby replicating the *modus operandi* of alphabetic glottography, of linearization, of unidirectional legibility. Because of this reliance on the regularity of alphabetic decoding, the montage-effect imbues the sequence with the illusion of necessity. The allegory of abstraction as purification attains the apodeictic form of a syllogism, moving from the particularity of naturalism to the universality of abstraction: the images are intended to replicate the movement of induction. The plot becomes an image of lawfulness, of regularity and predictability. The sequence is therefore not just allegorical: it aspires to scientificity, to the production of a general law through visual experimentation. As an illustration of the very principle of a new art, the image-composite becomes the template, the model through which all Neoplastic - and ‘absolutely’ abstract art for that matter - is to be read. Each individual work, every abstract work of art should be read as an example of this process, a possible variation grounded in a visual generative grammar. Each new artwork is the ‘illustration’ of its own genesis; the model is constructed to repress the anarchy of visual production, it is a way of policing meanings, of warding off the terror of the image’s polysemy.

However, as noted above, this self-image of Neo-Plasticism, and that of constructive universalism insofar as it is guided by the same narrative infrastructure of abstraction as process, is animated by a paradox. Neo-Plasticism, as the engagement with pure visuality without referentiality, anecdote or narrative – as the self-proclaimed self-discovery of the medium-specificity of painting as an autarchic two-dimensional structure of line, colour, and volume – is itself the effect of *istoria*.²²⁶ Paradoxically, it must recognize first what it must repress later, namely, its locus of origin, the messiness

the overlay of two haecceities, i.e., the Inca-cosmological and the modern, Cartesian cartographical (see 1.2).

²²⁶ For more on the notion of painterly *istoria*, see Chapter 2 (2.4).

of figuration. The figurative remains the ground for abstraction, since the syllogism's 'correctness' depends on the truth-value of realism. Abstraction thus becomes parasitic on naturalism: its supposed autonomy can only be upheld by granting figuration absolute power. Pushed to the extreme, this linear logic ends in absurdity. Indeed, if each image is indeed grounded in a figurative representation, does this mean that each abstract work of art has a figurative counterpart? Can abstraction be retraced to a referent? Is every abstract work a failed figurative work, or is every naturalist work but an abstraction waiting to happen? Does behind every abstract artwork lurk a Dutch cow and milkmaid? Would Van Doesburg not rather have been Vermeer? In addition, what Neo-Plasticism must also forget is one basic fact: the realist image, qua mimesis, is itself already an abstraction through the employment of the geometric operations of perspective in the service of the effect of the 'real.'²²⁷ Incidentally, this brings us back to Torres-García's untenable distinction between 'setting in order' - the principle of naturalist art that uses geometry in the service of representation - and 'creating an order,' which is supposedly the prerogative of the abstract tradition in which geometry is used for the sake of geometry alone for the creation of visual harmonies (cf. Part I). As was the case with the work of Torres-García, Van Doesburg's *Ästhetische Transfiguration* leads to the fundamental insight into the ultimate indiscernibility of abstraction and figuration. Both are relative terms caught in an interminable chiasmic dynamic.

A similar inferential logic is implicit in the visual 'constellation' model of the *Inverted Utopias* exhibition. This logic, as replicated in the catalogue, makes the metaphor of constellation legible as a stable sign denoting a progression toward

²²⁷ Of course, the point of contention revolves around the meaning of the 'real,' which, for artists working within the rhetoric of abstraction, is decidedly non-phenomenological. However, the force of their argument depends entirely on the image of another truth, that of realism (very broadly conceived here as any painterly practice for which figuration is not anathema) and its engagement with the perceptible. Yet, the pictorial genesis Van Doesburg provides in his sequential images embeds realism as its *sine qua non*: without it, the logical narrative the image sequence provides to make abstraction as process visible would be wholly unintelligible. This conforms to Cheetham's observation that the discourse of abstraction "depends on a [transcendent] absolute that denies art's materiality" (1991, 119). In the case of Van Doesburg and Torres-García, this negation is a covering-over: it is a camouflaging of the figurative that animates the discourse of purity inside-out. For more on Torres-García's tortuous relationship with figuration, which I deem indexical of his dissatisfaction with the rhetoric of purity (as his visual work seemed to 'disobey' it at every turn, and he wanted to reprimand it for not 'listening' to his writing), see Chapter 2 (2.3 and 2.4) and Chapter 3.

purification, toward the fixity of the static image-schema. As such, it loses its metaphoric power and becomes literal, a schema for subsumption. The visual narrative of *Inverted Utopias* moves from the opacity of the Milky Way to the assumed ‘transparency’ of Gego’s *Reticulárea*, with the latter adduced as the proof, the guarantee of truth of this literalization that purges the metaphor of ‘constellation’ of its poetic excess. Within this frame of legibility, Gego’s *Reticulárea*²²⁸ (Figure 4.5) is made legible as a literal ‘constellation,’ as an illustration of a concept, readily graspable by the *terra firma* of the schema. Gego is adduced as proof of the validity of this literalization, this reduction of the force of association so essential to metaphors. Metaphoric power derives from visual-verbal *mestizaje*: words that are usually not considered contiguous are juxtaposed, engendering new visibilities, and with these, new legibilities. Through poiesis, through the montage of the incongruous, each element becomes newly visible through the light of the other, effecting new forms through mutual interpenetration. Moving from the opacity of the Hubble photo, the image sequencing of *Inverted Utopias* suggests a transposition, a lowering of the heavenly bodies onto the terrestrial realm - the ‘limited vantage point’ - of the ideal viewer. This lowering mimics the progressive literalization of ‘constellation’ and thereby makes it a linguistic tool ready to carve up and classify images, as a means to quiet the terror of the uncertain sign, the uncertainty of a-signification through a classical “nomenclature” of the visible (cf. Foucault 1970, 226-252).²²⁹

²²⁸ For recent, thoughtful discussions of the work by Gego (Gertrude Goldschmidt), see *Gego 1957-1988: Thinking the Line* edited by Peter Weibel and Nadja Rottner (2006), *Gego: Entre la transparencia y lo invisible / Gego: Between Transparency and the Invisible*, edited by Mari Carmen Ramírez (2006) and *Questioning the Line: Gego in Context*, edited by Theresa Papanikolas and Mari Carmen Ramírez (2003). A recent bilingual edition of some of Gego’s writings has been published in *Sabiduras and Other Texts by Gego / Sabiduras y otros textos De Gego*, edited by Maria Elena Huizi (2005).

²²⁹ Rancière’s notion of the ‘representational regime’ roughly coincides with Foucault’s ‘Classical Age.’ The latter was characterized by a desire for taxonomy, naming, identifying, defining, tabulating – all means to make the world legible as a ‘categorical’ text, where each thing had its correlative in a name: a veritable encyclopedic desire. This, incidentally, is what Torres-García’s theory of *grafismo* is all about, although it evinces a Neo-Platonic twist. In *grafismo*, the pictogram does stand in a relation with a thing, but only insofar as the thing is a cover for an idea enveloped in a phenomenal ‘disguise’ (see Chapter 2, 2.2). For an account of the representational-classical regime, see the General Introduction.

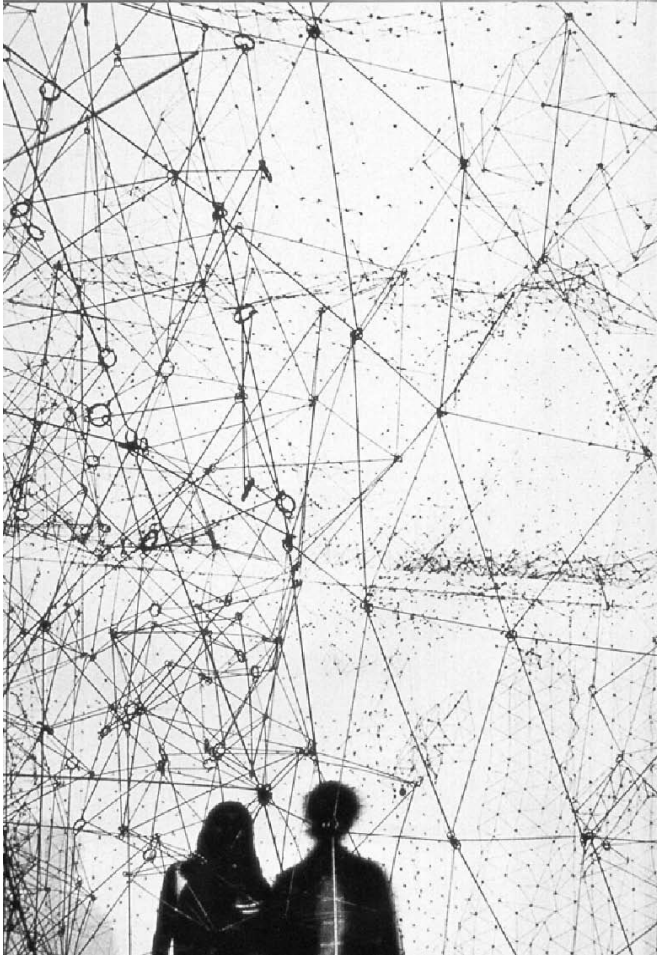


Figure 4.5 Gego, *Reticulárea*, 1968-81. Wire, variable dimensions. Photo by Paolo Gasparini. Fundación Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas. [Ramírez and Olea 2004, 254].

The visual-narrative logic of *Inverted Utopias* mimics the logic of abstraction as process, culminating in an ‘instructive’ model that mirrors its own operation (Figure 4.6). The movement from the opacity of the Hubble image – itself already thematized under the rubric of a photographic abstraction - to Gego’s constellation image concludes with the poverty of the schema. The latter functions as the transposable model that supposedly clarifies everything, giving the viewer the anchoring point through which to read the chaos of images with which he/she will be confronted. As in Van Doesburg’s pedagogical composition, the teleology of abstraction of *Inverted Utopias* reifies the anarchy of the constellation and all its unruly visual associations into the lesson of a fixed schema, which in turn provokes the logic of illustration. Furthermore, the schema’s architectonic brings us back to Torres-García’s tabulation of *grafismo*, in which each

visual element – each ‘star’ so to speak – is fixed in place and provided with a name for a transparent signified.

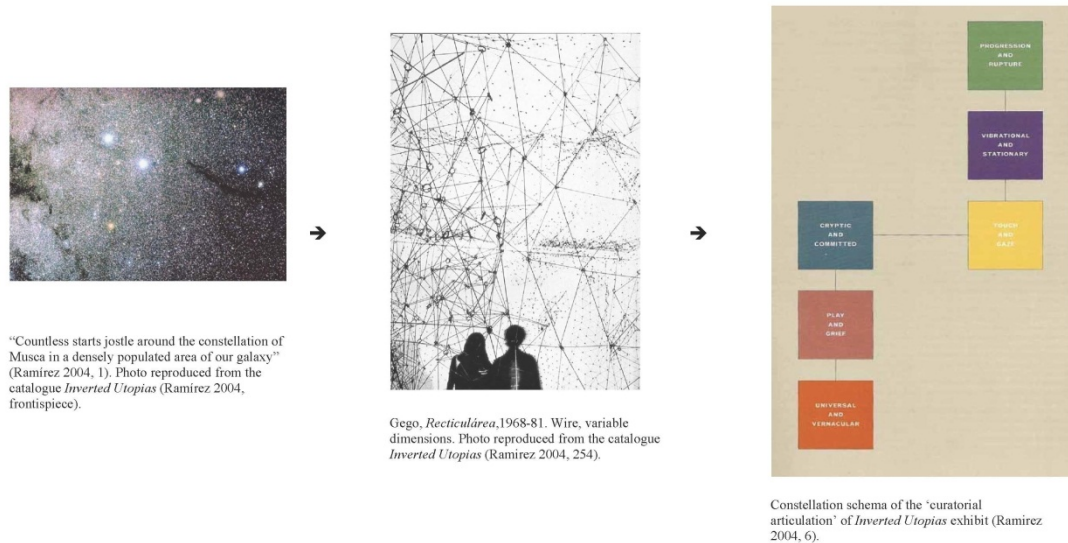


Figure 4.6 Diagram of the inductive visual logic of *Inverted Utopias*, with the constellation-schema as ‘denouement.’

Rather than resulting in an open-ended constellation, the schema constructs a retrospective ‘reading aid’ which makes the individual works legible under the caption of its respective ‘constellation,’ as a way of foreclosing interpretive labour.²³⁰ Rather than constellations, what the exhibit presents us with are congealed sequences - causal structures - masquerading under the guise of contingency. *Inverted Utopias* does not

²³⁰ Furthermore, the classical schema employed in this exhibition, in counterpoint to the anti-illustrative logic Adorno envisaged, is a means of structuring desire. The constellation of the exhibit’s catalogue, which effects the reification of Benjamin and Adorno’s constellation, is an image of desire, an image coming ‘from the stars.’ The etymology of desire says as much and implicates itself within the encyclopaedic desire of the curators (‘curatorial desire’): from the Latin *desiderare*, the word ultimately derives from *sidere*, ‘from the stars,’ with *sidus* meaning ‘heavenly body, star or constellation.’ Curatorial desire is here articulated through the logic of the example, where the work of art ‘illustrates’ one, or a combination of, the six ‘constellations.’ The resonances between desire and constellation echo the tautological flows of the setup of the display, as captured in the catalogue. Indeed, the latter goes no further than catalogue identity-thinking. The artwork has no say in this conceptual frame. However, perhaps such is the fate of the all-comprehensive blockbuster exhibition. It should not present itself as ‘constellatory.’

make Latin American art newly legible: it imposes a reading schema derived from a problematic paradigm of abstraction that has no interest in chance, in the risk that comes with making. All the art images in the catalogue are to be considered ‘instances’ of a constellation, which, from Adorno’s perspective, is precisely what it should counter. The aesthesis of the work of art prohibits its reduction – through the narrative plot of abstraction as process, as ‘illustrated’ by the sequence of images – to discourse, to a figure readily available for thought, instead of being a figure *of* thought to work through, to contend with, to make sense of.²³¹ Ramírez and Olea put images in the service of discourse, which is perhaps inevitable to some degree with exhibitions. However, the critical operation it promises remains but a wish-image. The images, as ‘illustrations’ are fixed in place as ‘signs’ within a general rhetoric so as endow the idea, the *eidōs*, of constellation with the extra ‘punch’ of the visual, of pictures, of the *eidolon*. In short, *Inverted Utopias* is the reification of ‘constellation,’ as well as the rigidifying of the spirit of the artwork.²³²

This gesture of abstraction/idealization, of forgetting the labour involved in reading and merely taking the result as a transparent starting point, can also be observed when looking at star maps, which show the groupings of stars as a mirror image reflecting the coordinates of our own “trifling terrestrial vantage point.” Some of the connections between the dots have become ‘canonical,’ while other possible patterns have not been sanctioned by history and tradition. Hegemonic star-patterns are like the

²³¹ It is here that Benjamin’s notion of the ‘ruinous’ allegory could help articulate a truly constellatory exposition. One could imagine the individual artworks in the way Benjamin frames his ‘fragments’: they provide moments of illumination, of flashes of truth, which allegory is at pains to put together while allowing the ruin to ‘speak otherwise,’ to speak obliquely. This would entail a radically different, and self-critical stance with respect to the curatorial desire to master the objects through knowledge (i.e., the many theoretical texts accompanying most contemporary expositions). A space would have to be conceived where legibility and visibility are short-circuited – perhaps the conventional, corporatized museum is not the best venue for such redistributions of the sensible (or, by that very reason, it is where it *should* take place, at least in principle, to be of note). For more on Benjamin’s notion of allegory, see Chapter 1 (1.2). In Chapter 7 (7.1 in particular), I will attempt to formulate a quasi-methodology that does justice to the discontinuities of legibility and visibility, as indicated by the term ‘emblematics.’

²³² In its subsumptive logic, it resembles Torres-García’s rhetoric of purity that similarly operates the reification of the ‘spirit’ of the work of art as something over and above the paintings, rather than what emerges in the thinking of the work through its materiality. For a summary of Adorno’s notion of the spirit of aesthesis, see Chapter 1 (1.3).

fixing of one moment, one specific image perceived in a moving cloud, fixing the shape of what one is supposed to see for generations to come, occluding other images that might arise through the fluctuations of time and perspectives. The twelve signs of the Zodiac, whose patterns, although lying more in the ‘eye of the beholder,’ now hold a claim to universality through historical consolidation. However, in contrast to the arbitrariness of this legacy, there is a multiplicity of alternative ways conceivable to connect these dots. In addition, the history of astronomy as allowing for terrestrial orientation is indelibly linked to colonialism as it enabled advances in circumnavigation, exploitation: the starry heavens above were never that innocent. This self-critical reflection on power and legibility/visibility is what is manifestly absent in *Inverted Utopias* - never does it mention the historical sedimentations that skew its own vantage point which compel it to make out one thing instead of another.

4.4 *South-South: The Constellation, Coloniality and Regimes of Visibility/Legibility*

The matrix of coloniality, the essential contingency of legibilities/visibilities congealed into historical ‘givens,’ is precisely what Argentine artist Luis Bénédict alludes to in the installation *South-South* of 2002 (Figure 4.7). I invoke this work – not part of the *Inverted Utopias* exhibition – as a way to approach the centrifugal, diagrammatic potential of Adorno’s understanding of constellation. By reading *South-South* through the mode of visual association, by giving the anarchy and potential infinity of analogies their due instead of framing the work in terms of a conceptual allegory, the artwork is unmoored from fixed models or schemas. In *South-South*, a star map is juxtaposed to a tripod carved out of tropical wood, with a machete resting on its base, suggesting that astronomy and geography colluded in carving and parceling out land, thus unmasking the supposed naivety of *stargazing*. That the handle is oriented towards a drawing of a landscape, with pictures of animal skulls and other archaeological forms, is perhaps suggestive of a gaze that is ‘self-inflicted.’ The carving up of the land, its surveying

through star maps, and the classification of (forgotten, extinct) species suggest a complicity between the image of the landscape and the image of the self, perhaps even intimating the coming extinction of mankind.



Figure 4.7 Luis Bedit, *South-South* with star map, 2002. Graphite pencil and paper, 136 x 186 cm. Wooden tripod and bone with knife, 120 x 60 x 60 cm. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires. [<http://www.benedit.com.ar/img/obras/sur-sur.jpg>].

This already shows the extent to which *South-South* is open to suggestion, to visual-verbal analogizing, a process without end, without a final ‘correct’ formulation that would encompass the flow of overdetermination and indeterminacy. Bedit’s work, through its juxtaposition of heterogeneous elements with the distinct regimes of visibility/legibility they activate, insinuates a contingency that makes it a true

constellation. The arrangement of objects does not guarantee a specific reading, it suggests, evokes, and produces resemblances through the sheer act of gathering unlikely objects. However, these associations are never wholly arbitrary: they are delimited by a historical context that allows for the pursuing of certain strands of analogy to appear more believable than others. There is always a conceptual horizon at work in the background steering the eye in a certain direction - putting a sewing machine, an umbrella and an operating table in contiguity does not always ensure a revolutionary statement. There is no transhistorical recipe-book for the concoction of forceful constellations: chance must conspire to put things together, while history intervenes in making juxtapositions legible as upsetting. At bottom then, *South-South* is a reflection on the contingency of epistemology and the effects of violence epistemological regimes carry over: knowledge shapes the world and the self. It intervenes, often violently, making the distinction between 'symbolic' and 'real' violence a matter of degree located on a continuum, a space where the mind and body become each other's extension. The mind only knows itself through the work of the bloodied hand that takes up the knife to carve up the world in its own self-image. As a statement on art, Bedit's work shows how it resists capture by master concepts developed in museum contexts, turning the knife against busy scissors cutting out picture to illustrate regimes of legibility. Bedit's constellation insists on the irreducibility of constellation, reminding curators - the custodians of good taste - that it is not one concept - say, 'constellation' - but a dynamic interplay between concepts that allows us to glimpse hidden, obscured sides. *South-South* is a denunciation of the logic of illustration.

South-South sheds light on the over-literalization of the notion of constellation as it has been 'curated' into fixity. It exposes how a concept is first and foremost an interpretation, a condensation of historical polysemy, including the legibility implied by the metaphor of constellation itself (as metaphor of metaphoricity itself). Indeed, Bedit's constellation prompts a reflection on the very notion of constellation, its locus of observation - here foregrounded by the title, *South-South* - and the distribution of epistemological regimes of legibility/visibility. By repositioning itself 'south-south,' it accentuates the hemispheric division of knowledge, as astronomy is rooted in the vantage point of the North as transparent locus of observation. Echoing Gary Urton's

observations on the deformations of Inca epistemology – and astronomy in this particular case – through overlaying it with a Northern locus of observation, making the Inca world conform to the monocular world of the West, Bénédit thus interrogates the same basic assumptions as did Pachacuti Yamqui's *Mundus Pontifical* (Figure 3.8), through his mestizo inversion of the hegemonic views on up/down, North/South.²³³ It confronts us – to reprise Urton's words (see Part I) with “problems as basic as mistakenly assuming which way is ‘up’; that is, in the southern hemisphere is ‘up’ north as it is in the northern hemisphere-or is ‘up’ south?” (Urton 1981, 5). Moreover, as Urton demonstrates, Inca astronomy includes a form of visibility that has long remained unintelligible to ‘Northern’ eyes. Andean astronomy encompasses so-called ‘dark cloud’ constellations that stand in counterpoint to the hegemonic regime of visibility associated with the very idea of constellation. Through its ‘dark clouds,’ Inca astronomy denaturalizes the locus of observation. It is, to adopt Torres-García's felicitous formulation, a “necessary rectification” (in Ramírez 1991, 53) to the synoptic regime of legibility from the ‘North,’ through Inca eyes that can discern, in addition to the usual practice of seeing geometric patterns and figures by connecting dots, “‘dark cloud’ animal constellations,” “patches of interstellar dust which cut through the Milky Way; to omit these celestial forms as constellations is to omit at least half of the complexity, and the beauty, of the Incaic system of astronomy” (Urton 1981, 10). These dark cloud constellations are “negative constellations” (ibid., 95), as it were lighting up the dark side of the concept of ‘constellation’ as luminous star-to-star pattern.²³⁴ The latter can be thought of in terms of

²³³ For a reading of Pachacuti Yamqui's image in conjunction with Torres-García's *Inverted Map*, see Chapter 3 (3.2). Both evince a subversive, *mestizaje* inversion of the hegemonic regime of visibility and the distribution of space in verticals and horizontals, and the values attached to up/down, North/South. Luis Bénédit shares in this critical stance.

²³⁴ Interestingly, this corroborates Adorno and Benjamin's insistence on the historicity of concepts. Although the constellation names the idea, it only does so through *analogy* (cf. Benjamin 1997, 34). That is to say, the word ‘constellation,’ although it wants to get at the ‘timeless’ idea (cf. ibid.), is a concept, and is as such irremediably enveloped in the materiality of the phenomenon (it ‘mediates’ (cf. ibid., 34-35) between phenomenon and idea). The constellation is a word to think the relation between legibility and visibility, and, as a consequence, it registers the ‘tremors’ of materiality, of historicity. Furthermore, Adorno is proven right in that the constellation is *socially* inflected: what Bénédit and Urton demonstrate is how legibility and visibility are effected through coloniality. Although one regime may reach ascendancy, the other lives on in the margins, insinuating itself into the dominant mode of thought, inhabiting it as its constitutive other. For more on the constellation according to Benjamin and Adorno, see the previous section of this Chapter.

geometric abstraction, as the production of geometric patterns that are ‘animated,’ by connecting the dots in culturally specific ways so as to arrive at figuration, as in the signs of the Zodiac for example. In the latter case it is the night sky that is the ground; the figure arises out of the geometric patterns evoked by the placement of dots, which in turn gives rise to potential colour planes, monochrome white celestial cut-outs against a black ground. By contrast, the ‘Southern’ Inca Milky Way is perceived in light (star-to-star legibility) and ‘in negative,’ effecting a complex chiaroscuro that makes indiscernible the distinction between figure and ground, since the dark ground has the capacity to become figure, through a complex gradation of greys in proximity to the ‘contours’ of white. The Inca – masters of the abstract tectonic paradigm on Paternosto’s reading (see part 1) – thus combined the ‘geometric abstract’ star-to-star constellation with the visibility of the “‘dark cloud’ (*yana phuyu*). The word *yana* is sometimes translated as ‘black.’ However, in the Quechua conception of light and colour classifications, *yana* is thought of as ‘dark’ (or ‘obscure’) in opposition to ‘light,’ rather than as black opposed to white” (Urton 1981, 109). The dark cloud constellation constitutes a counter-legibility.²³⁵ Yet, it is also immersed in the play of lines and planes made possible by star-to-star constellations, a play of positive (Figure 4.8) and negative (Figure 4.9): it further modulates the dialectic of dark and light into a baroque folding and refolding of intensities of grey.²³⁶

²³⁵ As such, the Incaic ‘negative constellation’ becomes a political commentary on the distribution of negative and positive space in the picture plane: figure and ground, dark and light, negative and positive, subaltern and hegemon are inverted and become indiscernible in the light of the dominant, ‘positive constellation.’ This makes the Inca image and the Western image of the skies enter into a truly critical constellation, as presented by Adorno and Benjamin. Both astronomical models have their relation to the experiential, and occasion a dissonance through which the un-thought – ‘nonbeing’ (Adorno 1973, 53), the utopian not-yet – finds a way into the imagination. The familiar sky becomes strange, opaque, enigmatic. Reading and viewing are put in question, and the contingency of the configuration of the world starts to ring through. At the beginning of this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the notion of constellation as it functioned in the thought of Adorno and Benjamin. The scope of my inquiry did not allow me a further investigation of the Incaic in relation to negative dialectics, but my intuition is that it might be fruitful in formulating a critique the status of the notion ‘constellation’ as a master concept in Adorno and Benjamin (and its metaphoric associations with navigation, capitalist expansion, cartography).

²³⁶ I will provide an account of the notion of the Deleuzian “fold” (Deleuze 1993) and the baroque in Chapter 5 (5.1.2).

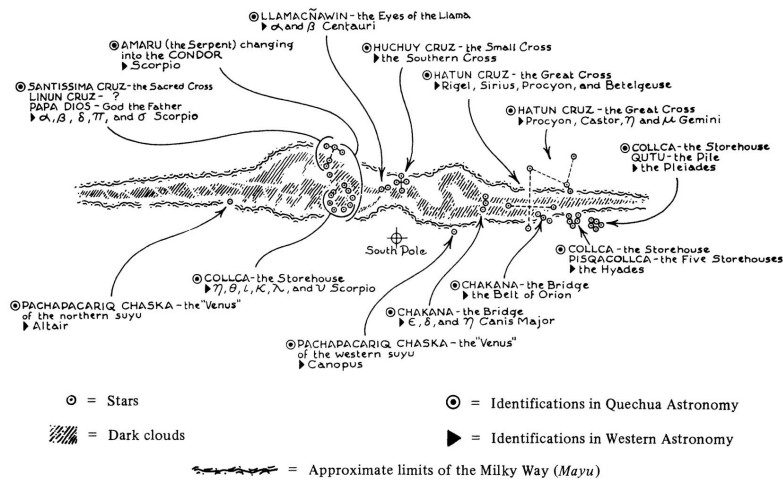


Fig. 32. The Star-to-Star Constellations

Figure 4.8 Drawing of star-to-star constellation. [Urton 1981, 108].

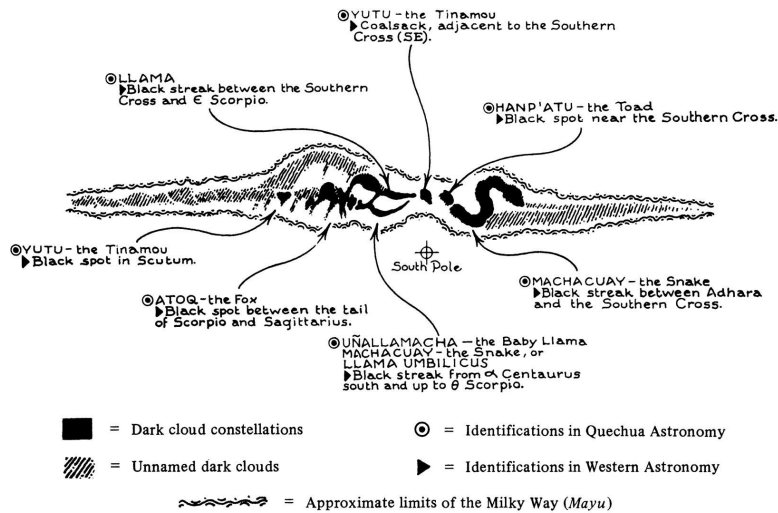


Fig. 33. The Dark Cloud Constellations

Figure 4.9 Drawing of negative constellation. [Urton 1981, 110].

This oscillation can be reframed in art historical terms, as the intersection of the painterly theory of *contorno* - with its distribution of *lux*, *umbra*, and *splendor* - with the gradation of the loaded brush. The 'dark cloud constellation,' in its complex oscillation between ground and figure through the gradations of lightness and darkness, is an apt

way of thinking of the loaded brush technique, its ‘milky’ evoking the gradations of white and dark of the Inca Milky Way, becoming more or less meaningful according to the intensity of greys, black and white. The dark cloud is the ‘negative’ of the loaded brush, with a black brush inverting the “figures loosely brushed in a milky, translucent white pigment” (Vincent Bruno, qtd. in Elkins 1995, 842). The negative constellation - as the ‘photo negative’ of the loaded brush, painting the Milky way in hues of more or less intense black - “allows varying amounts of pigment to flow to create variations of tone within the white without actually having to delineate shadows” (ibid., 856). Against the clear conceptual modulations of the positive constellation - with its system of contours set against a black ground - the negatively loaded Inca brush adds a layer of indeterminacy, turning the sky into an abstract expressionist canvas shot through with a repressed visibility that attenuates the sovereign lines of hegemonic legibility. At the point of intersection of both regimes, in an overlay that becomes increasingly fuzzy, the work of line and colour in the oscillation of plane and contour is further modulated through the Incaic “melting of the mark” (ibid., 842), a ‘dissolve’ of the autarchy of the clearly legible sign.²³⁷ This mestizo Inca sky is a canvas for the interplay of two regimes of visibility, a complex dialectic play, an oscillation between the regime of the white dots and their geometrical patterns – the ‘positive’ delineation of forms – and the gradual ‘photo-negative’ emergence of forms – the dissolve – out of gradations of ‘dabbings’ of intense blacks against ever-luminous whites. Line and colour, figure-ground are further enmeshed in an intricate play of gradation, with figures emerging, consolidating and vanishing through the intersection of these two visibilities, a complex drama unfolding on the living spectacle of the sky, forms passing in and out of existence, an almost baroque folding and refolding of form.

²³⁷ I will return to the ekphrastic displacement of the clear contour in my discussion of Foucault’s reading of *Las Meninas* (cf. Foucault 1970, 3-18) in Chapter 7 (7.1). His text will inspire the notion of ‘emblematics,’ which I will employ as a reading/viewing strategy – an ekphrasis – that thematizes the space of difference resulting from the juxtaposition of drawing, painting writing and reading. In addition, the autarchy of the sign refers back to Benjamin’s conception of allegory, which he proposed in direct confrontation to the ‘symbol’ as perfect image of beauty, sufficient unto itself, anti-constellatory. For more on Benjamin’s notion of allegory in distinction to the symbol, see Chapter 1 (1.1).

This *mestizo* working of weft and warp, of the threading of negative and positive into a celestial tapestry where North and South make up the fabric of the cosmos, makes *South-South* visible as a critique of the meta-icon, the theoretical image of ‘constellation’ and its ambition to light up what was previously dark. *South-South* replicates constellations, regimes of visibility, only to use them as the fabric for the production of a constellation of thought all its own, unhinging the concept from its pedestal of universality – as construed through the visual logic of Ramírez and Olea – and restores its contingency and opacity. As such, *South-South* carves out a polemical visibility that forces a contrapuntal legibility into being, a mode of reading the image that makes it resistant to ideational accommodation. It forces legibility off-centre by bringing critique back to earth, as a *modus operandi*. The constellation is but the momentary fixed image emerging, just for one moment, out of the ‘grey zone’ of the intermingling of positives and negatives, the North and South, before the break of day makes them illegible again. *South-South* insists on the negative force of the Southern celestial equator; its power unhinges and diffuses the stark contours of pre-set signification, including the image of constellation upheld in *Inverted Utopias*, even if the latter is full of such good intentions, of an ambition to dislodge old habits of thought that have hitherto always put South America under the sign of the ‘North’ only to repeat “worthy Portuguese sentiments,” to recall Oswald’s malicious phrase (1991, 40). If anything, *Inverted Utopias* merely rehearses what was already known. It does not invert, it merely empties all negativity by remaking the ‘constellation’ into another cover-concept for Latin America, now to be added to the taxonomy of the exotic, the marvellously real, the tropical, etc. By contrast, *South-South* brings to bear the full force of the ‘negative constellation’ onto any fixed, positive, ‘Northern,’ positive conception of the tabulation of the sky in clearly distinct grids with figures inscribed, as if the heavens were a system of *grafismo*, as if a work of art were merely in need of a correct label, an adequate name of a constellation, as if it were all just a matter of identity-thinking and correspondence theory, yet again. What of ‘Grief’? ‘Play’? ‘Committed’? – does naming not run counter to Adorno’s insistence on the negativity of the constellation model, does the name not make ‘constellation’ into a genus, with six species - or a biblical twelve, depending on how one interprets the *and* - within its hierarchy? In the words of Oswald de Andrade’s “Anthropophagite Manifesto,”

“[o]nly where there is mystery is there no determinism. But what does that have to do with us?” (1991, 41). What does a neat dialectical distinction add to things already set forth by an epistemological machine? The carving up of the world in distinct zones of mystery and determinism - the noumenal severed from the phenomenal - merely re-describes what ‘we’ had been practicing all along, without much thought: an embodied mystery, a sacred ingestion. Such scholastic differences make no difference.

In summary, what *South-South* does is intertwine epistemology and the affective. The constellation *South-South* performs the violence of the surveying eye, and the labour embedded in the technical apparatus of observation. The locus of observation is a locus of incision. The eye cuts up the land according to the fixed ‘positive’ constellatory model of the North, where celestial lines are transposed onto the ‘mannerisms’ of the earth, dividing it into countries, nation states with their boundaries drawn by a surveying eye that obeys the epistemological dictates of the starry sky above and its terrestrial counterpart, the implacable geographical grid with its parcelling out of space and time, the zoning of time, the clock-timing of continents. The indigenous and the ‘Northern’ enter in a relation of equivocation: the hand-carved tripod, coming from ‘over here,’ produced ‘indigenously,’ is not an import product, and yet, it is made in the image of the template of the original, reproducing, in the rough, what it should look like. This is a lens not just made for seeing. Or rather, seeing is a matter of making, of modelling – the ‘objective’ is a tool, ready at hand; objectivity is just a dream, a projection after all the dirty work has been done, after the landscape has been turned into a wasteland of bones, an evacuated space with a corresponding time where the machete lies idle in the wood, not even any skinning left to do; the dream of homogeneous, empty space-time realized. The tripod seems to have been self-generated through the work of deforestation of the machete, the latter clearing the vegetation and trees so as to allow a clear line of sight for the piercing, surveying eye. The gaze harbours a gesture, a taking possession at a distance to recall Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s words, which is here provided with a dark, colonial connotation.²³⁸ Theory itself now becomes complicit.

²³⁸ As Merleau-Ponty writes, “the painter’s world is a visible world, nothing but visible: a world almost mad, because it is complete though only partial. Painting awakens and carries to its highest pitch a delirium

In truth, in its “truth content” (cf. Benjamin 1977, 182)²³⁹ *South-South* is a sobering work that shows up my distinction, my carving (or any investment in a distinction) – as derived from Lyotard’s – between – the ‘logical field’ and the ‘sensory field’ as contingent, as always-already too ‘logical’ from the start.²⁴⁰ This distinction is a function that allows thought to think the image, yet it must always be mindful of its status as circumlocution, as ekphrastic asymptote to the unruly image, to the unruliness of a *South-South* with its disruptive potential as constellation, as holding the power of the negative. The divide logical/sensory is a theoretical fiction - “what does it have to do

which is vision itself, for to see is *to have at a distance*; painting extends this strange possession to all aspects of Being, which must somehow become visible in order to enter into the work of art” (Merleau-Ponty 1993, 127; emphasis in original). Emanuel Alloa (in Hortskotte and Leonhard 2007, 40-59), coins the phrase “ontology of inherence,” an ontology that makes vision possible, as ex-centric, as always beside itself: “I can visually grasp something at a distance only because my being is already inherent in the visible. Whence an ontology of promiscuity rooted in the conviction of a shared element, a common fabric to me and the things in the world, for which Merleau-Ponty uses the concept of flesh (‘chair’). Vision thus does not come from out of myself, it ‘happens among, or is caught in, things’ as an anonymous nascence” (Alloa 2007, 52). The chiasm that is vision, a linkage, an intertwining of subject and object, of visibility and tactility ‘fabricates’ a world in which each glance entails a moment of risk “where the possibility of a return possession is always lingering” (Alloa 2007, 52). Vision is always fragmentary, sparse, scattered, never final, never effecting a synoptic view but comprising a visibility revolving around blind spots, the invisible that cannot be grasped, but makes vision possible. Each moment of seeing is a kind of precarious interweaving, in which warp and weft intersect, cross, and spill over, as the gaze of the other weaves itself into the fabric of our own perception, upsetting its integrity, its autonomy. Perception is the partaking of the flesh of the other, and returns to the body of the self, through the “reflexivity of the sensible,” where “my outside completes itself in and through the sensible,” but never giving an integral view - vision is always beyond, grasping outside itself (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 168). “All flesh, and even that of the world, radiates beyond itself,” which is what the painter knows; the flesh is his craft as “the art of painting is always within the carnal [dans le charnel]” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 186). However, such an ‘ontology of inherence’ is utterly naïve in that it forgets how the legible is constitutive of its own viewing, which it thinks it can capture by a ‘transparent’ description. This, incidentally, is where Rancière is utterly correct: phenomenology is blinded by the beauty of its own rhetoric, making it unable to see that what it describes is in sense already spoken for, inhabited by the legible (cf. Rancière 2007, 69-89; see the General Introduction for more on Rancière). To ‘merely’ write what one sees, to attest to ‘brute visibility,’ is to fail to grasp that such writing is an overwriting, an insertion within a citational circuit of meaning, of a language already having composed the world as meaningful in a highly specific way. Legibility is always-already inscribed: it is this that constitutes the ‘invisible’ otherness that lives in the visible. *South-South* makes us ‘see’ that phenomenological description, that the notion of ‘having at a distance,’ is already a thematization of the coloniality of seeing. Benedit shows that this legibility is coloniality.

²³⁹ In Chapter 1 (1.1), I give a short description of Benjamin’s notion of ‘truth content’ as opposed to ‘material content.’

²⁴⁰ For an explication of Lyotard’s notion of the “sensory field” and my use of the term ‘logical field,’ see the general Introduction as well as Chapter 2 (2.3 and 2.4).

with us?” - that functions only on an analytical level, the level of discourse, and can only ‘point’ – survey through its own ‘objective’ – to the thickness of images via the detour of the word. *South-South* is the intertwining of the affective and the logical, the sensory and the discursive, an ‘indistinction’ between two ‘Souths’ we know under the name of coloniality. *South-South* loops us back into the indiscernibility – the hybrid, the tension of permanent oscillations – of ‘up,’ and ‘down,’ ‘North’ and ‘South’ of Torres-García’s *Inverted Map*.²⁴¹

The constellation is not the only way to deconstruct museocannibalism. *Antropofagia* is also a tactic to break open and disperse the collecting, archiving, storing and displaying of artefacts through a voracious gaze intent on parcelling, tabulation, and anchoring of the image through ready-made visibilities, through the logic of the example. However, one can only effect this break by reading the ‘founding’ text of the Brazilian avant-garde movement of *antropofagia*, the 1928 “Anthropophagite Manifesto” (1991, 38-47), as a hyperbolic articulation of the tactic of “permanent contradiction” (ibid., 43). Instead of making it mistakenly legible as an ‘example’ of a sublative logic, a reading that only works by ignoring the manifesto’s most essential trait, i.e., its telegraphic, aphoristic style, Oswald’s text takes an uncompromising position ‘inhabiting’ the ‘in-between,’ as the incessant oscillation between opposites. The following chapter will read the manifesto in conjunction with some of Tarsila do Amaral’s images in an attempt to make this ‘principled contrariness’ palpable.

²⁴¹ Torres-García’s *Inverted Map* figures the historical, colonial contingency of orientations of reading and viewing. This is what I argue in Chapter 3 (3.2), and throughout the entirety of Part 1.

Chapter 5

5 Antropofagia, *Abaporu* and Baroque Superposition

5.1 Introduction: To Be Modern and Baroque: Antropofagia's Neobaroquism

5.1.1 Modernism in the Brazil of the Twenties

We lived about eight years, until around 1930, in the greatest intellectual orgy that the history of the country has known.

Mário de Andrade, "The Modernist Movement," 1942²⁴²

In the history of Brazilian Modernism, one event stands out with an almost mythical status, a 'topos' every study on South American modernism must take into account, as if it were the sudden, unexpected birth of the new onto the colonial plane: the *Semana de arte moderna* (Week of Modern Art) held in São Paulo, 1922, on the occasion of the centenary of Brazilian independence.²⁴³ This already indicates the extent to which avant-

²⁴² The English translation of Mário de Andrade's lecture, a retrospective assessment of the heady days of modernism and antropofagia in Brazil, originally delivered in 1942, can be found in Schwartz (2000, 593-601).

²⁴³ The following account is but a very condensed overview of the context of the Brazilian avant-garde as it gained prominence in the 1920s. Due to the focus of the present work, some names as well as historical nuance had to be omitted. However, for more comprehensive historical treatments of the Week of Modern Art, and the context of emergence of modernism, in literature, music, architecture, theatre and the visual arts in Brazil in general, see, amongst others, Barrie 1991, 35-37; Fabris 2000, 533-539; Sadlier 2007, especially 187-195; Unruh 1994, 12-13; 44, and especially the monumental catalogue *Brasil, 1920-1950: De la Antropofagia a Brasília*, edited by Jorge Schwartz (2000) and the four-volume *XXIV Bienal de São Paulo* catalogue under the general direction of Paul Herkenhoff and Adriano Pedrosa (1998). For recent, critical and more specific engagements with the idea and practice of modernist art in Brazil, its relation to nationalism, and the polemic of whether it constitutes, in Roberto Schwarz turn of phrase, a "misplaced idea" (Schwarz 1992, 19ff), i.e. the importation of an avant-garde ideology onto a non-industrial society - the ever-recurrent question of modernism and underdevelopment - see Roberto Schwarz's *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (1992; esp. 1-32; 108-126), Randal Johnson's "Brazilian Modernism: An Idea

garde experimentation was embedded within a de-colonial frame, and the rapprochement of Brazilian Modernism with the production of a national imaginary as a means to distinguish it from the European and North American avant-gardes and the propagation of 'Brazilianness' through artistic experimentation. An interdisciplinary event with lectures, poetry readings, concerts, and exhibits centred at the Municipal Theatre, the week, in the words of writer Mário de Andrade, one of the driving forces of Brazilian modernism, manifested "the permanent right to aesthetic experimentation; actualization of the Brazilian artistic intelligence; establishment of a creative consciousness" (qtd. in Sadler 2008, 188). As Icleia Maria Borsa Cattani points out, the Week of Modern Art was first and foremost a symbolic statement, a "milestone more in terms of the scandal it provoked and the programmatic impulse it exposed than by the actual qualities of the works presented. The real quest for Modernism in art began after the *Semana de arte moderna*" (Cattani 2001, 381). The impact of this inaugural event was similar to the 1913 Armory Show, with the eclecticism of the Brazilian artists presenting Brazil with tentative ways in which the hegemonic Modernist idiom could be refashioned through 'tropicalization,' evincing a "didactic impulse to show the public the possible broader spectrum that existed in Modernism" (ibid.). The week is so prominent because it gathered the scattered avant-garde experimentation prior to 1922 into a clearly visible, collective form, forcing the general public to take heed of an art that went beyond prevalent, accepted tastes still derived from European academicism. However, as

out of Place?" (in Geist and Monléon 1999, 186-214), as well as Luís Madureira's discussion of underdevelopment and Brazilian modernism in the opening chapter, "Lapses in Taste: Antropofagia as the Primitive Aesthetic of Underdeveloped Brazil" of his *Cannibal Modernities: Postcoloniality and the Avant-Garde in Caribbean and Brazilian Literature* (2005; 21-51). For recent, more general discussions of Modernism and Latin America, see, amongst many others, Carlos Alonso's *The Burden of Modernity: The Rhetoric of Cultural Discourse in Spanish America* (1998), Néstor García Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (1995), Jorge Larraín's *Identity and Modernity in Latin America* (2000), *Modernism and its Margins: Reinscribing Modernity from Spain and Latin America*, edited by Anthony L. Geist and José Monleón (1999), *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, edited by Gerardo Mosquera (1996), Alberto Moreiras's *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies* (especially Chapter 2, "Negative Globality and Critical Regionalism" (49-75), which focuses on the issue of modernization), Martin Hopenhayn's *No Apocalypse, No Integration: Modernism and Postmodernism in Latin America* (2001). Suffice it to say that this constitutes only an infinitesimal part of the general debate on modernity and post-modernity as it pertains to Latin America. This section of the text is heavily indebted to the aforementioned sources.

opposed to its now mythical status, the week was long in preparation: it was not a spontaneous, sudden outburst of the ‘new,’ but rather the crystallization of tendencies coming together in an explosive moment of unity. Before the Week of Modern Art, modernism had already some foothold in Brazil with the work of popular-conservative poet Monteiro Lobato, whose work bore the traces of Filippo Marinetti’s Futurism, while sharing the latter’s ultra-nationalist stance, transposed to the Brazilian context. In 1921, Mário de Andrade published his poetry collection *Paulicéia Desvairada* (translated as *Hallucinated City*, 1968), introduced by the programmatic “Prefácio Interessantíssimo,” advocating “poetic polyphony” (“loose phrases”) as a formalist experimentation with the sonority of words to engender a feeling of “superimposition, no longer of words (notes) but of phrases (melodies)” (qtd. in Campos 2007, 384 n10).²⁴⁴ Oswald de Andrade’s *Memórias sentimentais de João Miramar* (1924; translated as “Sentimental Memoirs of John Seaborne” in 1972) already announced the writer’s radical break with poetic and literary convention through the adoption of a lapidary aphoristic language, breaking through the excesses of lyricism. Oswald would experiment even further in this direction in his great *antropofagia* anti-novel *Serafim Ponte Grande* (1933; published in English in 1979 as *Seraphim Grosse Pointe*), “breaking down the articulation of traditional novelesque form” (Campos 1979, 113).

In the visual arts, Russian émigré Lasar Segall – “Lithuanian by birth, German by training and at the end of the day more Brazilian at heart than anybody” (Bonet 2000, 522) – set up two exhibitions in 1914, before settling in São Paulo for good in 1923. However, in these early stages of his career his expressionist work was ignored by critics who were still ill at ease with the new tendencies in painting. It was only after the Week of Modern art that sensibilities would drastically change. By contrast, Anita Malfatti’s early exhibition of expressionistic portraits in 1917 caused quite a stir amongst a public habituated to realism and diluted impressionism. Recalling the familiar charges of ‘degeneracy’ initially levelled at German expressionism, Monteiro Lobato condemned her work as “decadent,” “cross-eyed,” nothing but the “boils in the excess of culture”

²⁴⁴ Excerpts from the preface – rendered as “Extremely Interesting Preface” – are available in English translation in Caws (2001, 382-386).

(qtd. in Sadlier 2008, 189). However, as Sadlier comments (ibid.), “[a]mong Malfatti’s youthful defenders were poets Oswald de Andrade and Guilherme de Almeida and the artist Di Cavalcanti. Mário de Andrade made his own public statement of support when he later purchased Malfatti’s *The Yellow Man* at the inauguration ceremonies for the Modern Art Week” (Figure 5.1). This solidarity extended to the establishment, in the wake of the week, of the so-called *Grupo dos Cinco* (Group of Five), consisting of painters Malfatti and Tarsila do Amaral, the writers Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade and poet and painter Menotti del Picchia. Another direct result of the week, the modernist journal *Klaxon*, became the vehicle for literary avant-gardism and extended the ambience of experimentation, no matter how short-lived (the review ran only from 1922 to 1923). The tone of the new was set.

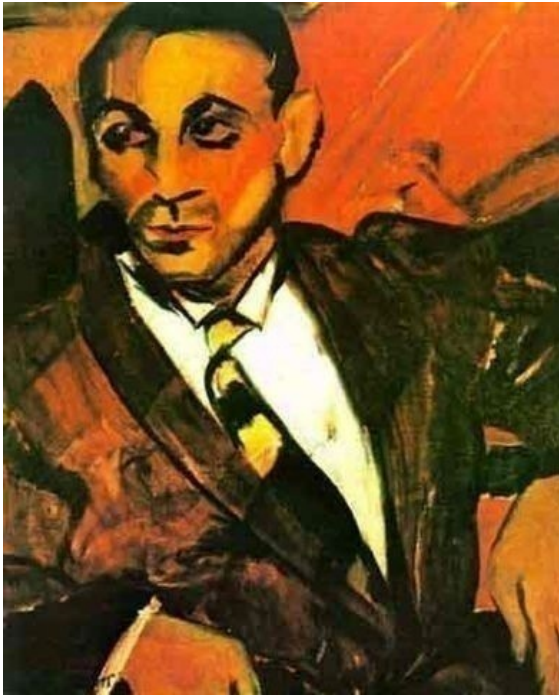


Figure 5.1 Anita Malfatti, *The Yellow Man*, c.1916. Oil on canvas, 61 x 51 cm. Mário de Andrade Collection, Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo. [http://www.febf.uerj.br/pesquisa/images_semana/anita_malfati_ohomemamarelo.jpg].

Typical for the Brazilian avant-garde and Latin American modernism at large for that matter (cf. Unruh 1994, 221ff.) was the intertwining of a futurist, modernist sensibility – the desire for the new, the modern – with a project of de-colonization posed in decidedly nationalistic terms. It is thus an avant-garde that insists on formulating its model on its own terms; it is a matter of creating the model, and no longer of modelling oneself after the hegemonic example, unless to parody this ‘exemplarity.’ The constitutive tension of Brazilian modernism was the clash between the “desire to bring things up to date” and a context where “technological revolution” was “much more myth than effective presence” (Fabris 2000, 534). More precisely, Brazilian *modernismo* found its ‘wish-image’ of ‘being up-to-date,’ of synchronicity with its erstwhile colonial masters, through the shock of the ‘old’ and the ‘present,’ the rural, the Amerindian, the urban *mestizo* ambiance that had been disavowed by refined aesthetic sensibilities. To become modern, Brazil had to break with academic sclerosis by turning to what lay ready at hand, with what it had always-already been but had failed to fully grasp. Only by gathering the strata of the Amerindian, the Afro-Brazilian and the (rural) colonial into a project of modernization, of combining the ‘forest and the school’ in Oswald’s words, could modernism become truly Brazilian.

This is precisely what Oswald de Andrade intends with his poetry collection *Pau-Brazil* and the “Manifesto of Pau-Brazil Poetry.” *Pau Brasil*, the poetry collection by Oswald de Andrade published in Paris in 1925 and illustrated by artist Tarsila do Amaral (Figure 5.2) - a creative union Mário de Andrade would playfully dub ‘Tarsiwald’ (cf. Schwartz 2000, 541) - can be read as an engagement with the productive tension resulting from a reframing, from a change of perspective. By taking possession of what is ‘over there’ – the formal innovations of the European ‘historical’ avant-garde – and rearticulating it through the ‘over here’ of the local, i.e., the colonial heritage, the Afro-Brazilian, the Amerindian, something unfamiliar emerges which is now claimed as one’s own. As the manifesto stipulates, this type of new poetry is to constitute “the counterweight of native originality to neutralize academic conformity” (Oswald de Andrade 1986, 187), a conformity embodied at that time by that “machine to make verses, the Parnassian poet” (ibid.).



Figure 5.2 Tarsila do Amaral, cover of Oswald de Andrade's *Pau Brasil*, 1925. [Bonet 2009, 18].

Pau-Brasil is named after Brazil's main export product, an exportation that goes back as far as the initial stages of discovery and colonial exploitation. Brazil itself is named after a commodity, the red dye extracted from the brazilwood tree, a hue so prized by the hegemonic centres. Pau-Brasil poetry intends to become a new major export product, flooding the Northern markets, making the 'North' dependent upon the poetic creativity coming from the South, in an inversion of the economic order of the day in which Brazil is totally beholden to the fluctuations of the economic policies of hegemonic powers and the domestic *café com leite* model.²⁴⁵ As the 1924 "Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry" emphasizes, against "imported poetry" stands "Pau-Brasil Poetry: for

²⁴⁵ The economic collapse of 1929 showed the extent to which Brazil was dependent upon its main export product, coffee, and how it was regarded as a 'resource' country by industrially 'advanced' nations, lacking in local commodity production; it had to import the majority of finished products and was therefore entirely reliant on the economic policies of colonial centres. The 1930s in Brazil were marked by an increased politicization of the cultural sphere in relation to the economic depression, with artists taking up a more militant stance after the utopian fervour of the Modernism of the twenties. In response to the Great Depression, Brazil moved in a more autocratic direction after Getúlio Vargas's 'revolution' of 1930, which was followed in 1937 by his coup and the installation of the "authoritarian or corporatist *Estado Novo* (New State)" (Madureira 2005, *Luso-Brazilian Review* 41:2, 99). In response, artists grew more politically committed, seeing how their utopia of Brazil had turned into a dystopia. The socio-economic collapse also prompted an abandonment of the "old seigniorial politics of *café com leite* (that is, the alternation of political power between the state of São Paulo's coffee-producing barons and the dairy oligarchy of Minas Gerais)" (ibid.). The economic collapse thus marked the end of antropofagia and its exuberance, at least in its 'official' guise as a collective artistic movement.

exportation” (Oswald 1986, 186), a new ‘brand’ of poetry composed on a “dual and actual base - the forest and the school. The credulous and dualistic race and geometry, algebra and chemistry soon after the baby-bottle and anise tea” (ibid., 185). This educated primitivism can only become truly Brazilian by embracing its idiosyncrasies, its own idiom, “without archaisms, without erudition. Natural and neologic. The millionaire-contribution of all the errors. The way we speak. The way we are” (ibid., 185). Brazilian Modernism played on the tensions between different temporalities, mobilizing the pace of the rural, the half-forgotten colonial towns in the interior of the country in counterpoint to the frenzied pace of the urban, the coastal centres. It also played on the heterogeneity of the make-up of its inhabitants, the Afro-Brazilian as the site of memory of slavery and coloniality, the Indo-American, the creole as well as more recent waves of immigration from Europe in the forging of a national imaginary premised on the ideology of mixture, of a certain non-identity as the core identity in the composition of ‘Brazilianness,’ as a way of doing justice to the “millionaire-contribution of all the errors,” forgotten by official history.

The same emphasis on folk authenticity is echoed by Mário de Andrade, who, as an accomplished musician and musicologist in his own right, advocated the generation of a truly Brazilian musical idiom that would “differ from a mere transposition of European models.” He “defended an alliance between erudite music and rural popular music, in which he saw safeguards for the basis of an authentic national culture” (Wisnik 2000, 557), the same alliance of the “forest and the school” proposed in the Pau-Brasil manifesto. Composer and musician Heitor Villa-Lobos heeded this turn to the ‘vernacular’ in music, and added the Indo-American rhythms in the creation of a music whose “barbaric powers of sonorities” combined the European legacy with that of “popular and indigenous music, even in the most far-flung corners of the Amazon” (Wisnik 2000, 557), a music registering the “flight into the bohemian world of Rio de Janeiro,” with “traces of his musical travels in Brazil imprinted on his work, from the *Noneto* (1923) to the *Choros* (1920s) and the *Bachianas brasileiras* (1930) with which he was known in Paris” (ibid.).

Following the main lines already sketched in the “Manifesto Pau-Brasil,” viz. its call to a genuine Brazilian ‘export culture,’ the “Manifesto Antropófago” of 1928 attained paradigmatic power, giving rise to the short-lived but highly influential *antropofagia* movement. The manifesto was originally published in 1928 in the first issue of the follow-up to *Klaxon*, the *Revista de Antropofagia*, a cultural review edited by Alcântara Machado and Raul Bopp. The manifesto encloses a drawing by Tarsila do Amaral, and, leaving its elevation of the rural and vernacular somewhat to the side, engages in a reclamation of Tupi culture. The same concern with the restitution of Amazonian indigenous cultures is also found in Raul Bopp’s *Cobra Norato*, considered as one of the greatest achievements of the movement together with Mário de Andrade’s *Macunaíma*. *Cobra Norato*, Raul Bopp’s epic poem first published in 1931 with a cover illustrated by Flávio de Carvalho (Figure 5.3), is also based on Amazonian mythology, the latter providing the means for the expression of Brazilian identity through a reworking - a (re-)writing - of Amerindian oral culture. The poem, a salvaging of the Indo-American ancestral voice with its aura of presence, an *indigenismo* literary tactic characteristic of much of Latin American writing concerned with national identity at the time (cf. Unruh 1994, 221-234), tells the story of a nameless youth, who, after killing the great snake Norato in his heroic quest through the jungle underworld of Cobra Grande to save a girl, clothes himself in the snake’s skin and takes on the name of his one-time enemy.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ For an extensive critical discussion of the work and the uneasy balance it strikes between the principally inclusive, anarchic antropofagia movement and the exclusionary, xenophobic, ultra-nationalism of the *verde-amarelismo* movement, see Madureira (2005, 52ff).

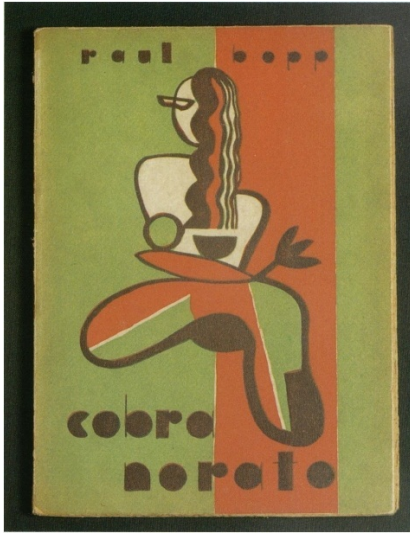


Figure 5.3 Flavio de Carvalho, book cover of the first edition of Raul Bopp's *Cobra Norato*, 1931. [http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_FSXbtt4Jv4/SnBYyw91LiI/AAAAAAAAADwI/II91JjkkN4I/s400/flavio+carvalho.jpg]

The principally anarchist and inclusionary *antropofagia* movement had its dark double in the exclusionary, fascist *verde-amarelismo* movement, whose main exponents were Plinio Salgado and Cassiano Rocardo. Intent on a “quest for a national childhood” (Madureira 2005, 30) *verde-amarelismo* devoted itself to a systematic study of Nheengatu, the general term for the languages of the Tupi, the initial inhabitants of Brazil at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese. This preoccupation with Tupi language was also shared by *antropofagia*, but in the case of *verde-amarelismo* it served more overly ideological prerogatives. Linguistics, etymology, and modernism were combined into an explosive political mix predicated on the over-valuation of the notion of origin - and the connotations of (racial) purity it carries - with, in the words of Salgado, Tupi being framed as “a language almost in its nascent stage, directly linked to nature” (qtd. in *ibid.*). Nonetheless, if the Tupi constituted the origin of Brazil, they were not figured as its destination. Informed by José Vasconcelos’s teleology of the ‘cosmic race’ as the progressive strengthening of bloodlines through the incorporation of the ‘fittest’ races, *verde-amarelismo* saw the Tupi as but one, now defeated, stage in the development towards racial synthesis. In this account, the European immigrant was accorded pride of place: the triumph of the European race would be transferred onto the New World. Paradoxically, colonialism acted as proof of superiority, and the *bandeirantes* were

considered as the first true Brazilians – similar to the status of the gaucho in Argentina, an object of intense fascination and nostalgia by some parts of the intelligentsia – and true heirs to the European crusaders having settled in this new Holy Land so as to boost Brazil’s ‘physiognomy’ (cf. Madureira 2005, 30-35). Spoken from the locus of *verde-amarelismo* ideology, Oswald’s playful tropicalization of Hamlet’s dilemma, “Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question” (Andrade 1991, 38), acquires a racist, dystopian overtone.

By contrast, and despite its nationalist overtones, *antropofagia* and Brazilian modernism as a whole was outspokenly cosmopolitan. The twenties in Brazil were marked by a mutual exchange between European and South American avant-gardes, each influencing the other. The Swiss poet and novelist Blaise Cendrars played a pivotal role in these cultural routes of exchange. “Blaise Cendrars discovered Brazil for Brazilians” (Bonet 2000, 520), but also for Europeans, and the traces of Brazil are imprinted in his poetry collection *Feuilles de Routes* (1924) accompanied by Tarsila do Amaral’s “almost stenographic illustrations” (ibid., 520). Brazil played an active part in a global dynamic of cultural exchange with its routes of travel, in a back-and-forth between the European, North and South American avant-gardes constituting a loose network of interactions. More or less frequent visitors from the centre (mainly Paris) were Marinetti, Le Corbusier, Hermann Keyserling, Henri Michaux, Josephine Baker, David Alfaro Siqueiros, the surrealist poet Benjamin Péret and many others.²⁴⁷

Incidentally, it should be noted that the work of Flávio de Carvalho stands out with respect to the *modernista* movement. Never one to identify with one or the other artistic idiom or medium, he moved freely between expressionism and surrealism, architecture, costume design, visual art, illustrations, writing and painting. Furthermore, his dadaist provocations, his ‘performances’ as we would call them now - his *Experiência*

²⁴⁷ For a comprehensive account on the routes of artistic exchange between the centre and periphery and their mutual influence, see Carlos Augusto Machado Calil’s essay “Translators of Brazil” in Schwartz 2000 (563-578).

no. 2 the most notorious of them all²⁴⁸ - embedded artistic experimentation within an autobiographical mythos. This radical attitude, this questioning of the notion of ‘Brazilianness’ itself - a notion so dear to the avant-garde at that time - was not “not understood and not accepted by the Modernists” (Fabris 2000, 537) and anticipates the later experiments of Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark.

The more or less methodical concern with Tupi culture can be traced as far back as the work of Vicente do Rego Monteiro. In the eyes of Brazilian critic Walter Zanini, as paraphrased by Jorge Schwartz, he was “the first modern artist to show his systematic interest in the congenital aspects of the country by means of representations of the life and legends of the natives” (Schwartz 2000, 541). This painter from Pernambuco, who, in “1920 discovered the pottery of the Indians on the island of Marajó,” “enthusiastically embraced native topics” (ibid.). His stylized pre-Columbian nativism, in a way anticipating the work of Columbian artist Fernando Botero, would remain a constant in his body of work (Figure 5.4).

²⁴⁸ For an excellent overview of Carvalho’s astonishing range, see Rui Moreira Leite and Izabel Murat Burrbridge’s essay “Flavio de Carvalho: Modernism and the Avant-Garde in São Paulo, 1927-1939.” This richly illustrated article provides a compelling sketch of Carvalho’s anarchic art production, and comments briefly on his dadaist provocations-performances, which he called *experiências*. Of *Experiment no. 2* of June 1931, “perhaps as a last anthropophagic manifestation,” he conducted an “audacious foray into the field of social psychology” attending “a Corpus Christi procession in downtown São Paulo without uncovering his head, for which the crowd nearly lynched him” (Leite and Burgrdge 1995, 201), while, at one point, walking against the stream of the procession.



Figure 5.4 Vicente do Rego Monteiro, *Seated Figure*, 1924. Oil on canvas. Fundação José e Paulina Nemirovsky, São Paulo. [Bonet 2009, 195].

In 1921, Rego Monteiro moved to Paris where - in harmony with the spirit of primitivism ruling over the epicentre of the avant-garde at the time - he published his illustrated book *Legendes, Croyances et Talsimans des Indiens de l'Amazone* (1923), “in which he introduced many of the native traditions and myths later to be found in Mário de Andrade’s famous anthropophagous novel *Macunaíma*” (ibid.), published in the annus mirabilis of 1928. *Macunaíma*, whose subtitle, “The hero with No Character” epitomizes the anthropophagic principle of ‘inconstancy,’ of allowing oneself to be moulded by outside influences, of forever being in the making through the ingestion of foreign influences. This foreignness is quite literal, since the novel is a patchwork of ethnographic accounts restructured and remoulded into a ‘tropical,’ surrealist anti-novel.

Tarsila and Rego Monteiro were, in the words of Juan Manuel Bonet “in the process of taking over and Brazilianizing the European, mostly French avant-garde” (Bonet 2000, 522). Tarsila tropicalized cubism, “creating a visual utopia that was hard to glimpse in the real space of the city” (Fabris 2000, 536), of a still somewhat provincial São Paulo during the *Pau Brasil* period. “Descended from the São Paulo coffee-cultivating middle class” (ibid.), Tarsila created wish images, images of a possible future for Brazil, through a tropical geometry and *caipira* colours. Her canvasses make visible a paradisiac-industrial Brazil “freed from all tension by the presence of technological

artefacts created as totems” (ibid.) (Figure 5.5). This may explain why many of her paintings have so readily become shorthand for ‘tropicality,’ part of a repertoire constituting a commodified imaginary of a Brazil of bright colours and beautiful beaches. Today, Tarsila’s cityscapes are legible as romanticized utopias of a past, ‘tourist attractions’ to missed destinations and the registration of broken bourgeois promises of what a tropical modernity could have looked like, without the inconvenience of the grimy favelas.



Figure 5.5 Tarsila do Amaral, *São Paulo*, 1924. Oil on canvas, 67 x 90 cm. Pinacoteco do Estado de São Paulo. Acquired by the Governo de Estado, 1931. [Bonet 2009, 127].

This painting of visual utopias, of possible versions of a harmonized future in which nature and technology have found each other would be interrupted by the violence of *Abaporu*. The latter presented the painter with a mystery, running counter to her usual image of modernity, a middle class “attempt at reconciliation between maintenance of class commitments and a wish for renewal of cultural structures” (Fabris 2000, 536).

Against Annateresa Fabris's devastating critique of Tarsila's painting as tepid chimeras of an elitist mindset brimming with good intentions and wishful thinking but lacking in political imagination, and by that token merely reproducing images voicing a "superficial modernity free from splits or dialectic tension" (ibid.), I propose *Abaporu* and some of the antropofagia paintings as a counter-argument showing how tension was of the essence, if only for a moment. Although only a small constellation of images, the antropofagia paintings posed the artist and the bourgeois São Paulo bohemians with a mystery they were forced to think through, as articulated in the need for a new movement and a new name, i.e., antropofagia, as if all of a sudden the stakes had been raised. It is as if she had painted something that should have been left unpainted, something that presented the *modernistas* with their own blind spot, now confronted with the ominousness at the heart of their utopian longing.

It was only to be a short bright moment. Soon it would be buried underneath a new conformity, a new regime of legibility/visibility, a reorientation of priorities. The great 'intellectual orgy' of aesthetic experimentation had come to an abrupt end, sobriety and hunger set in, the utopian dream became visible as a childish trifle, cannibalism was now reviled as the distant mumble of the roaring twenties, a luxury problem. The radical politicization of the cultural field following the 1929-30 economic collapse and the ensuing Great Depression would leave no wiggle room in the binary between 'committed' and 'non-committed' art, between thinking and acting, as if politics were merely a matter of volition of painting social realist murals. The beautiful dream of modernization would become actual, but only through repression, dictatorship, i.e., the corporatist, fascist New State of Getúlio Vargas. In retrospect, it is as if *Abaporu* knew something of this in advance, as if it already foreshadowed, as an after-image of a future yet to arrive, the naivety the artistic movement would come to accuse itself of. Rather than an image of a "superficial modernity free from splits," antropofagia speaks in contradictions only - it leaves no room for thinking synthesis: it is contradiction on display - there is nothing reassuring about it if one reads it well. The mystery posed by the antropofagia paintings and some of the writings, a mystery closed off by the historical urgency of what was to follow and the ensuing demise of antropofagia ('formally' ending around 1934) as movement is what will be re-imagined in the pages that follow. Before I

turn to the birth of antropofagia however, a detour through the baroque is necessary, as modernity and the baroque are constitutively intertwined in the avant-garde of South America.

5.1.2 A Neobaroque Modernity: Antropofagia's Counterconquest

In the beginning was the baroque; in the beginning was the quote. As Monika Kaup argues, “the New World neobaroque ... constitutes ... a site-specific hybrid modernity” (Kaup 2006, 128) in which a different, marginalized image of thought – “baroque reason” (cf. Buci-Glucksmann 1994; see below) - was retrofitted, ‘cited,’ to shape South America’s modernity. This rediscovery of baroque reason equally prefigured the postmodern, in that it amounted to the recognition of

the modernity of the baroque - that is, the baroque's earlier role as the first response, both in Europe and in the Americas, to the epistemological and spiritual crises of the Scientific Revolution and the Reformation. As a non-exclusive, de-centering principle, the seventeenth-century baroque constituted the West's first modernity. Unlike Enlightenment reason, baroque reason conjoined the contradictory impulses of the pre-modern and the modern, faith and reason, the scientific and the mythic, thus marking the crisis and outer limit of modernity - a crisis and outer limit that reappears in the twentieth century under the sign of the ‘postmodern’ (Kaup 2006, 129).

In the ‘South,’ the colonial baroque was one of the possible paradigms where the “originary moment of Latin American sensibility” (Salgado 1999, 317) could be located in counterpoint to the model of European modernity. The alternative to a reclaiming of the New World baroque was to frame the distinctness of the South American in terms of the recuperation of the pre-Columbian, non-hybrid, anti-baroque essence, since the baroque, from this perspective, was intelligible only as instrument of domination and degeneration. The ensuing “rhetoric of purity” (Cheetham 1991) of the latter strategy was the focus of inquiry of the previous chapters (i.e., 1, 2 and 3) in its constructive universalist articulation, and how this discourse was destructured by a neobaroque, visual *mestizaje*. By contrast, antropofagia gives shape to the ‘originary moment’ by its

reimagining of the colonial baroque: the image of origin it proposes is self-reflexively ‘unoriginal’ in that it undermines the notion of origin at its roots, and thereby creates a modernity of a “beginning without origin” (Moraña 2005, 259). Through the conflation of the baroque and the modern as signalled by Kaup, antropofagia could claim the Barroco Mineiro as the modernizing agent propelling their avant-garde practice. In addition, as the previous introductory chapter has highlighted, an ethnographic gaze inflected antropofagia’s baroque modernism, as well as Brazilian modernism at large, making the rhetoric of indigenous purity clash with colonial *mestizaje*. In fact, what will become increasingly clear in the following chapters is that antropofagia produces affinities between Tupi thought and a baroque ontology of the surface, and its deconstruction of an absolute *arche*. What is involved is the baroquing of the Tupi no less than the ‘becoming-Tupi’ of the baroque: antropofagia devours everything in order to bring difference about, but the precise locus of this difference becomes indiscernible.

In its claiming of the New World baroque as the “minor” subversion of the “major”²⁴⁹ projects of modernity, antropofagia announces the more theoretical reflections of a later generation of writers and essayists, who, from the 1950s onwards, offered more or less systematic engagements with what was to become the ‘neobaroque.’ The work of the Cuban trio José Lezama Lima, Alejo Carpentier and Severo Sarduy proved especially influential in the development of this paradigm, which, rather than figuring the baroque as an ideological vehicle for colonial domination, made it legible and visible as a period of creative contestation. In fact, “neobaroque theory sought ... to find hybrid dissent at the time of greatest colonial conformity and quiescence” (Salgado 1999, 317). Through the theoretical framework of the neobaroque, antropofagia becomes legible and visible as such a tactic of ‘hybrid dissent.’ However, before exploring antropofagia’s intervention, I will provide an overview of some salient aspects of the debate on the baroque and their bearing on the Brazilian movement.

²⁴⁹ For more on the work of deterritorialization of the ‘minor’ in relation to ‘major’ configurations as Deleuze and Guattari (1986) propose, see Chapter 1 (1.1), where I view Torres-García’s theory of constructive universalism as a ‘becoming-minor’ of canonical abstraction.

“What is Baroque?”: The Baroque as Over-Determined Concept of Under-Determination

To echo Gilles Deleuze’s question, “What is Baroque?,”²⁵⁰ is to make the baroque legible as, to quote Mabel Moraña, the “*art of citation*.”²⁵¹ To reiterate the question is thus already to announce its new folding. To repeat the question is to intimate an answer: the baroque is what makes the neobaroque legible, visible, intelligible, while the ‘original’ baroque does the same for its ‘new’ inflection.²⁵² “The Neobaroque is not ... a *creative* art, but an *art of citation*” (Moraña 2005, 253; emphasis in original), just as, for Deleuze, the baroque “does not invent things” (Deleuze 1993, 3), and does not “refer ... to an essence but rather to an operative function, to a trait.” The baroque is the principle of heterogeneity in the multiplicity of answers it generates. There is not one baroque, the baroque is as many as its re-foldings: it is infinite to a fault.

In *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture* (2004), rather than give a definition of the historical baroque and its new incarnation, Gregg Lambert offers a panoply of views - a veritable intellectual cornucopia - of how the baroque has been conceptually poached and reframed by individual thinkers.²⁵³ This book that attests to the “rhizomatic dispersion of articulations of the neobaroque” (Kaup 2006, 932), points to the overdetermination of the baroque, which simultaneously seems to have a specificity bordering on that of aesthesis (cf. Adorno 1997)²⁵⁴ in that each author has his or her

²⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze, Chapter 3 of *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 27-38.

²⁵¹ Mabel Moraña, “Baroque/Neobaroque/Ultrabaroque: Disruptive Readings of Modernity,” in Spadaccini and Martín-Estudillo 2005, 241-281; 242 (emphasis in original).

²⁵² I will return to the distinction between the baroque and neobaroque further on in this introductory section. However, for now it is important to stress the intertwining of the ‘original’ baroque and its ‘new’ inflection, its citation, or rather, its citation of the art of citation. It is an affinity that borders on the indiscernible, thereby questioning the operation of (our classical image of) epistemology and the notion of ‘historical specificity.’ It makes the question ‘what is baroque *as opposed to* neobaroque’ appear as parodic, as already a baroquing of binary thinking.

²⁵³ Heeding the baroque ‘operative function’ of a new folding, Gregg Lambert’s *The Return of the Baroque* reappeared in 2008 as *On the (New) Baroque* (Aurora, Colo.: Davies Group, 2008), almost like the reinvention of *Don Quixote* by Pierre Menard.

²⁵⁴ For a discussion of the ‘spirit’ of the artwork as the effect of the confrontation of thought – which demands determination – and the indeterminate multiplicity of the aesthetic, see Chapter 1 (1.3).

baroque, as if it were a question of taste.²⁵⁵ As concept, the baroque defies conceptuality. Since modernity is polyvocal, so is the baroque:

Because there has been more than one tradition of modernity, there have been just as many baroques. ... Does this mean, however, that the baroque of Benjamin is the same baroque for Foucault, or Lotman; or that of Sarduy or Carpentier, or even of Borges himself? Absolutely not! Rather, *each to their own baroque!* And if only because they did not share the same tradition of modernity, which is to say, they did not share the same sense of humour (Lambert 2004, 140; emphasis in original).

The baroque revolves around the specificity of the ‘humours,’ and upsets the architectonics of the categories of the understanding.

In short, to pose the question of the baroque is to feel the force of its many repetitions, making one realize that the “baroque as a label has become so overdetermined as to render it flexible to a fault” (Friedman 2005, 284). Its hyper-specificity has paradoxically made it appear as non-specific and a-historical, attesting to a principled “inconstancy” (Castro 2011), as index of the subversiveness of “baroque reason” in its “proliferation of unfixable forms generating non-identity logics” (Buci-Glucksmann 1994, 132).²⁵⁶ Baroque, as the logic of inconstancy and non-identity, is

²⁵⁵ This dispersion has reached a new apex, signalled by terms such as *barocco brut* (Zamora 2009) and *ultrabaroque* (Ono 1996; Armstrong and Zamudio-Taylor 2000; Moraña 2005). The hollowing out of specificity, supposedly ‘degrading’ the neobaroque into an empty signifier signifying nothing (in particular) or everything at once through a ‘post-neobaroque,’ is critiqued by Leo Cabranes-Grant and leads him to ask the rhetorical question of the term’s desirability: “Mabel Moraña argues that there is an ‘Ultrabaroque,’ a critical discourse in which the specific devices that identify Baroque and Neobaroque styles are being sublated into a more generalized cultural attitude. This Ultrabaroque state of mind conflates all Baroques with the hegemonic energy of the postmodern paradigm. Do we really need another beyond, a post-Neobaroque? Are we reaching a point of saturation—quite ironic when dealing with the Baroque—or is the Ultrabaroque another point for a Lacanian saturation, a fashionable model for the subjectivities of our global age?” (Cabranes-Grant in Zamora and Kaup 2010, 481). Although specificity is of course a concern, and the problem of conflating Ultrabaroque with the ideology of fashionable eclecticism of postmodernity is genuine, one could ask: When has the Baroque ever *responded* to a ‘need’? This, would indeed be another, added baroque irony that Cabranes-Grant highlights. Indeed, is the neobaroque not the space where desire is made to fluctuate and run its course, a desire reflected in the production of impossible neologisms, expressive of a counter-image of reason ‘centred’ on the figure of the oxymoron (cf. Buci-Glucksmann 1994, 134-135)?

²⁵⁶ I will develop the notion of Neobaroque “inconstancy,” a term I have borrowed from Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul* (2011), in relation to the word-image nexus of antropofagia in the current chapter (section 5.2.3). For a preliminary exposition of the ‘inconstancy principle’ as it resisted colonization, see Chapter 3 (3.2).

“another reason” that envelops and subverts the “logic of identity propositions (X is A) which philosophically regulates the political community” (ibid.). Owing to its general economy of citationality, the question of the baroque is already diffuse, making the baroque amenable to a trans-historical approach. The question of the baroque pushes the notions of historical specificity and the trans-historical into formidable, antonymous tensions. Most of the critical debate on the baroque revolves around the settling of its conceptual ‘border,’ a question doomed to failure, since the baroque - and this is my contention - is principled indiscernibility at work. That is to say, what the baroque does, as operative function, is to capitalize on the discontinuities of visibilities and legibilities, to tear them apart and effect their vertiginous recombination. However, I am not denying historical specificity: I merely wish to stress that the baroque poses the question of specificity in its full force, forcing thought to think ‘aesthetically’ in Adorno’s sense,²⁵⁷ to demand thought to come to terms - but without having any ‘final say’ - with the baroque and neobaroque inconstancy principle. Inconstancy is historically grounded, and this I will explore in the following chapters, i.e., as it arises out of coloniality, and the way antropofagia gives it body.

Baroque: Historical Structure, Artistic Style, Trans-Historical Counter-Reason or A-Historical Essence?

The Brazilian artists Adriana Varejão encapsulates the view on the (neo)baroque as a-historical phenomenon.²⁵⁸ Reflecting on her work, she observes that

the Baroque is a timeless style which makes you understand that art is nothing but pure culture. That art comes from art and not from nature ... The baroque is also about disguise, changing skins, make-up, artifice. ... The Baroque thrives on absolute interior. On a cleavage between facade and inside, exterior and interior. However, it’s as if they were in the same fold, reflecting both sides. The incisions in my paintings thus tend to reveal a carnal interior that

²⁵⁷ Cf. Chapter 1 (1.3).

²⁵⁸ I will explore some of Adriana Varejão’s paintings in Chapter 7 (7.2). There, I will provide a further gloss on the way she constructs an image of the baroque that echoes the statements of Tarsila do Amaral. This neobaroque *ars combinatoria* of fragments of other texts and images produces an endless proliferation of echoes and reworkings, decentering in advance any historical narrative that would claim exhaustiveness.

overflows onto the surface. Through the incision I thrust one side into the other. That's how body and culture ... reason and plastic sensuality blend together in my work (qtd. in Sollers 2005, 81).

This statement brims over with baroque erudition and citationality: it is a Neobaroque display of rhetorical virtuosity that combines the words of Deleuze (invoking Leibniz), Buci-Glucksmann, Jacques Lacan, Charles Baudelaire, Severo Sarduy and Walter Benjamin (and undoubtedly many others, echoes of other echoes...) in a vertiginous collage of quotations, making other voices speak through in name of her 'own' painting. Not only Varejão's visual art, but her speech is equally baroque, an echo chamber in its own right, a patterning of borrowed phrases that are transformed into her 'own.'²⁵⁹

What Varejão's words do is perform the baroque's operational function, grafting themselves onto prior discourses to effect an accumulation of regimes of legibility and

²⁵⁹ The entire interview from which this quote is taken is itself a collage of erudition, in which the words of the interviewee refract an entire history of discourses on painting, artifice (as opposed to nature), the baroque and the experience of coloniality. The title of the interview, "Echo Chamber," which is also the title of the opening chapter of Severo Sarduy's Neobaroque theoretical investigation *Barroco* (1974), already names the citational circuit of the body of the text. The resonances with other statements on the Baroque are too numerous to detail. I will restrict myself to quoting some passages that seem to echo most forcefully in Varejão's words.

In overcoming this hystericization of the male body of the written work, Baudelaire ends in something very close to panic; anxiety about the sexed body of women, alternately felt to be sublime and profane. The cultural and existential anxiety is so radical that, in a break with a whole philosophical tradition since Plato, he places the feminine in a relationship not to nature but to culture, or, more precisely, to the distance introduced by culture: make-up, artifice, fashion, apologia for a modern urban beauty (Buci-Glucksmann 1994, 78-9).

Woman is quite within her rights, indeed she is even accomplishing a kind of duty, when she devotes herself to appearing magical and supernatural; she has to astonish and charm us; as an idol. She is obliged to adorn herself in order to be adored. Thus she has to lay all the arts under contribution for the means of lifting herself above Nature, the better to conquer hearts and rivet attention. It matters but little that the artifice and trickery are known to all, so long as their success is assured and their effect always irresistible (Baudelaire 1964, 33).

A fold passes through living material in order to allot to the absolute interiority of the monad the metaphysical principle of life, and to make the infinite exteriority of matter the physical law of phenomena ... Baroque architecture can be defined by this severing of the façade from the inside, of the interior from the exterior, and the autonomy of the interior from the independence of the exterior, but in such conditions that each of the two terms thrusts the other forward (Deleuze 1993, 28).

Incidentally, it would be interesting to explore the confluence of Woman, Beauty and Artifice that Adriana Varejão conjures up - without directly broaching the issue of gender - that underlies the citational circuit. For a consideration of the image of Woman in relation to Baudelaire's aesthetic and his conception of Modernity, see "Baudelairean Space: A Modern Baroque," Chapter 3 of Buci-Glucksmann's *Baroque Reason* (1994, 74-81).

visibility, ceaselessly adding to the infinite economy of semiosis. It is a parodic speech - a *parallel canto*²⁶⁰ - that distances itself from its authority to speak about what is the 'essence' of 'her' visual work, by riddling her discourse with "holes through which the gaze can slip" (Lyotard 2011, 38),²⁶¹ as so many eyes of other textual authorities. It is allegorical in the sense Buci-Glucksmann specifies, who, following the 'authority' of Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, contrasts it with the centripetal symbol informing the classical image of reason. Allegory, as the mode of thought of 'baroque reason,'

brushes aside all essentiality, all identity or uniqueness, in accordance with its almost etymological nature: the Greek *allegoria* coming from *allos* ('other') and *agoreuein* ('to speak'). For allegory consists precisely in saying something other than what one means, or in saying one thing so that, by oblique procedures, another thing will be understood. But this *discourse through the other* is also *discourse of the Other*, a vocalization and staging of an otherness which eludes direct speech and presents itself as an elsewhere (Buci-Glucksmann 1994, 138).

As such, the artist's stance was only seemingly a-historical, saturated as it is with the echoes of other legibilities speaking of the baroque: it is a statement compressing the history of the receptions of the baroque, a patchwork of other theoretical pronouncements which are now adduced into speaking the truth of her artistic praxis. Varejão's words are the site of a condensation of views coming from elsewhere - the baroque speaks obliquely, through otherness, through an authority that is not one's own, speaking the dispossession of language: coloniality in its broadest sense.²⁶²

The baroque as aesthetic style period received its most methodical expression in the work of Heinrich Wölfflin, whose consideration of baroque architecture prompted the designation of a 'painterly style' in opposition to the rectilinearity – the clarity of line and

²⁶⁰ For more on the relation between parody, allegory and parallel canto, see Chapter 2 (2.4). I also devote attention to parody in my discussion of Oswald de Andrade's "Anthropophagite Manifesto" in Chapter 6 (6.3).

²⁶¹ In Chapter 2 (2.3) I briefly discuss Lyotard's concept of the 'figural' as the visual 'thickness' that fractures the integrity of discourse.

²⁶² I will return to Varejão's words in section Chapter 7 (7.2).

contour – of classicism.²⁶³ The baroque, as interface of architecture and painterly effects, plays on the contrast between the massiveness of materiality in counterpoint to the ethereal movement of light, charging surfaces with movement and dynamism. Baroque structures “transgress the rules of architecture” (Wölfflin 1964, 29), engaging in a chiaroscuro motility that defies the “strictly architectonic conception of architecture” (ibid., 30). The “painterly effect” (29) makes visible “moving masses, the restless, jumping forms or violently swaying ones which seem constantly on the point of change, and not by balance and solidity of structure. ... [P]ainterly architecture acts through what it *appears* to be, that is, an illusion of movement” (ibid.; emphasis in original). Baroque is the choreography of matter, annihilating the strictness of the contour, leading the eye ‘astray’ to trace out “a movement of dispersal ...; it has no bounds, no definite break in continuity, and on all sides it increases and decreases. This, basically, is how the painterly style evokes an illusion of constant change” (ibid., 31). Baroque is “the dissolution of the regular, a free style or one of painterly disorder. What is regular is dead, without movement, unpainterly” (ibid., 32): the baroque gives life to the “agitated” (60) surface of the facade.²⁶⁴ As Varejão puts it, baroque matter is matter “teeming” with life (qtd. in Sollers 2005, 81).²⁶⁵

Against Varejão’s (simulation of) the eternity of a style, José Antonio Maravall’s socio-historical inquiry into the baroque as structure stands out in its historical determinateness. In *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure* (1986), Maravall locates “baroque culture” (Maravall 1986, 3) in a precisely delimited space-time: Spain from 1600 to 1670-80 (ibid., 4). Maravall focuses on the social relations

²⁶³ However, as Wölfflin himself repeatedly points out, the Baroque and the Classical are not terms in a binary. Instead, they should be thought of as points on a continuum, as two possible extremes caught in a dialectic interplay: “Neither of these extremes [the classical and the Baroque], of course, exists in a pure state” (Wölfflin 1964, 30). It is for the purpose of analysis that they can be discerned, but they are actualized in ‘mixed’ states. All reference are to Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque* (London: Collins, 1964).

²⁶⁴ In Chapter 4 (section 4.4), I take up James Elkins’s deconstruction of the painterly theory of *contorno* through a consideration of the loaded brush technique in relation to the negative constellation of Inca astronomy. The loaded brush can be considered as the paradigm of the ‘painterly baroque’ through its dissolution of the contour.

²⁶⁵ I will expand on Varejão words, which recall her “rapture” (qtd. in Sollers 2005, 81) upon laying eyes on the Barroco Mineiro for the first time, in Chapter 7 (7.2.1).

during this epoch of crisis, in which the baroque appears as an ideological apparatus of mass spectacle in the service of the Counter-Reformation. It is an age marked by ‘structural anxiety,’ in which a plethora of spectacular media were mobilized to counter the spectre of delegitimization of the authority of Church and State.

However, even a study with such a strict historical focus – in counterpoint to what Maravall perceives as the ‘laxity’ of the baroque conceived as period style – does take cognizance of the proliferating power inherent in the notion, conceding that the concept ‘baroque’ possesses a strange power to unhinge the strictness of temporal framing. As though feeling the push of the trans-historical, centrifugal force of the (neo)baroque, Maravall signals that “there can be a certain correspondence among external or formal characteristics occurring in one field or another,” which makes it “possible that one can speak of a baroque at a given time, in any field of human endeavor” (ibid., 6). Maravall is generally suspicious of the anarchy of resemblances, and treats the demon of analogy with ironic disdain: although similarities do provide “entertaining” reads, “they do little to add to our historical knowledge of the epoch” (ibid., 7).²⁶⁶ Despite his tentative intimations to the contrary, Maravall’s inquiry is propelled by a classical idea - the Benjaminian ‘symbol’ - of an ‘epoch,’ of its conceptual self-sufficiency. The artistic,

²⁶⁶ Maravall does seem to allow for some flexibility, since “historical epochs are not snipped away and isolated from one another by the dividing line of one year or one date” (ibid., 3). This ‘divergence’ leaves open the “possibility that certain advanced phenomena of baroque significance appeared some years previously, in the later times of Michelangelesque Mannerism and, in Spain, with the construction of the Escorial,” while a geographical concession is made in that other European and non-European cultures (cf. ibid., 4) did see baroque phenomena. However, on the whole, Maravall’s perspective is rigorously historical, in that he provides a strict delineation of how he wants his concept of the baroque to be interpreted: “I do not, therefore, use the term baroque to designate morphological or stylistic concepts, repeatable in culture, that are chronologically and geographically disparate. One may certainly establish certain relations between external, purely formal elements of the baroque in seventeenth-century Europe and elements present in very different historical epochs in unrelated cultural areas” (ibid., 4). Yet, for the purposes of his analysis, these are deemed irrelevant. Cultural manifestations that evince a certain baroque sensibility but that fall outside of the scope of his chronology are not taken as ‘proper’ manifestations of the baroque, since “the sense of epoch is different” (ibid.). To further compound the merely token flexibility of the baroque, he characterizes the baroque phenomena removed from the Iberian cultural centre as ‘derivative’: “By way of derivation, the culture of a baroque epoch can manifest itself (and has become manifest) in the American countries indirectly affected by the European cultural conditions of that time. By way of derivation, the culture of a baroque epoch can manifest itself (and has become manifest) in the American countries indirectly affected by the European cultural conditions of that time” (ibid., 3). It is this sense of derivation that neobaroque, New World theorists will marshal against Eurocentric, concentric, centripetal conceptions of culture. They will counter this static image with the centripetal, trans-historical neobaroque dynamic (cf. *infra*).

economic and socio-political phenomena all speak the same, unitemporal truth. In other words, by disallowing the possibility of multiple temporalities - in which an epoch is defined by regimes of simultaneity, an archaeological time where past, present and possible futures are superimposed²⁶⁷ - Maravall's baroque reverts to a punctual 'epoch.' The (neo)baroque interrogates the limit of the historical. This, I believe, explains Maravall's unease - his ironic distancing from analogies 'run wild' - with the anarchic potential of the concept of the baroque, with its incessant folding back upon itself.

In *Neobaroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (2004), Angela Ndalians takes up Maravall's notion of the ideological function of baroque spectacle and gives it a trans-historical twist by establishing a regime of resemblance between the Baroque and its reappearance in contemporary mass entertainment. Capitalist expansion and the general crisis of legitimacy as reflected in the gradual demise (imagined or real) of traditional authoritative state apparatuses, brought about a culture of crisis to which the baroque and neobaroque respond by mobilizing new technologies of mass 'diversion' so as to capture the imagination of the subject. Both eras bespeak "a spatial attitude dictated by economic and technological transitions," with the (neo)baroque semiotically negotiating a "transitional state" "in open, dynamic visual and textual forms" (Ndalianis 2004, 21). The neobaroque, through the "development of new imaging and information technologies, the dominance of globalization and transnational corporatism, and new theoretical paradigms in the sciences (such as quantum mechanics and chaos theory)," marks "a point at which the old and the new coexist, when older paradigms that dominated throughout the modern era are being unsettled and contested. This is a time of cultural shift; chaos and uncertainty appear to reign" (ibid., 22). This, Ndalians argues, is where the baroque and neobaroque converge. In response to this paradigm shift, the neobaroque - as did the baroque before it - registers a change in attitude towards space, in effect inaugurating a different conception of spatiality altogether. This is manifested in post-modernity's engagement with seriality and the polycentric, which constitutes the essence of a Neobaroque aesthetics that concerns itself with infinity, with the incessant

²⁶⁷ This, incidentally, is the image of time that Walter Benjamin presents in "On the Concept of History" (2003, 389-400).

folding and refolding of cultural forms in an *ars combinatoria* without ‘central text,’ where the spinoff is indistinguishable from the ‘original,’ and where the frame is not the limit but the condition of possibility of overflowing, of the invasion of the viewer’s perceptual space.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, “(Neo)baroque form relies on the active engagement of audience members, who are invited to participate in a self-reflexive game involving the work’s artifice. It is the audience that makes possible an integral feature of the baroque aesthetic: the principle of virtuosity.” (Neo)baroque dynamism self-consciously “complicates classical spatial relations through the illusion of the collapse of the frame” (ibid., 28), thereby inaugurating a new understanding of space, characterized by a “serial thought” (71) aimed at the allegorical recombination of fragments (cf. 79), reflecting an ontology of intertexts (cf. 72).²⁶⁹ This spatial consciousness was evinced in the Baroque through the development of mapping, as a means of “adjusting to the new conditions of capitalism” in which “the search for, mapping of, and colonization of geographical space became potent vehicles” of state power and mercantile expansion (130).²⁷⁰ Ndalianis traces a formal similarity between mapping, hypertextuality and cyberspace (cf. 110), observing that

Whereas the seventeenth century was the culmination of a radically new understanding of space in light of newly discovered lands and altered perceptions of the nature of outer space and Earth’s place in relation to it, our own era explores the mysterious realms of the computer. Cyberspace, like the newly discovered material spaces of the seventeenth century, has expanded not only our conception and definition of space, but also our understanding of community and identity (27).

This perspective, which traces mostly formal resemblances without imputing any critical force to the Baroque, mutes the possibility of making the (neo)baroque legible and visible

²⁶⁸ This echoes Wölfflin’s notion of the ‘painterly style,’ expressive of a baroque aesthetics in which the frame is transgressed, and what is framed ‘invades,’ moves, and steps out into the open, confounding the border between subject and object, between the perceiver and the perceived (cf. above).

²⁶⁹ In her analysis of the contemporary baroque sensibility, Ndalianis relies on Benjamin’s notion of allegory, noting that present-day “entertainment forms function like ruins and fragments, evoking the existence of a past in the present while simultaneously transforming the ruin into a restored, majestic structure that operates like a richly layered palimpsest” (73).

²⁷⁰ See Chapter 1 (1.2) for a discussion of Joaquín Torres-García’s deconstruction of the “assemblage haeccceity” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 262) of the map by overlaying it, in his *Inverted Map*, with a cosmological stratum.

as a counter-hegemonic praxis (as New World baroque theory will), or at least as a praxis with utopian rather than merely ideological potential.

Rather than a vehicle for co-optation, I will explore the inner tension of the (neo)baroque in its contradictory movements between its power of contestation and instrument for ideological capture. From this perspective, the baroque is as much an ethos of continuity as an ethos of subversion. It is as a critical, polemical spirit that antropofagia appropriated the baroque, and it is in its defiance of hegemonic structures that I will make antropofagia legible, although not neglecting its ideological aspect, i.e., its alignment with the discourse of the nation state and its identity politics. This makes antropofagia a space where an uncomfortable tension between identification and dis-identification is played out, a friction already thematized in the word ‘cannibalism.’

Baroque Reason and Antropofagia

The power of contestation inherent in the Baroque is perhaps most forcefully articulated in Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity* (1994). For Buci-Glucksmann, the baroque is not a style or epochal concept but a historically grounded way of thinking, a counter-image of thought that subverts the hegemonic idea of reason still grounded in Cartesian *ratio*. The latter is founded on the principle of non-contradiction, and made possible an understanding of logos that received its first definite articulation in Plato and Aristotle and has been dominant ever since. Against the (classical) image of instrumental reason with its logic of identity, baroque reason thrives on the logic of dis-identity, on the ambiguity of irony, evincing “the logic of an ambivalence which no synthesis can move beyond,” positioning itself “in opposition to all substantialist ontology” (Buci-Glucksmann 1994, 136). The baroque mocks the “fusion of rationality and power, that logic of identity propositions (X is A) which philosophically regulates the political community” (ibid., 132). That is to say, baroque reason mocks classical *ratio* by showing its artificiality, that its truth is an effect of virtuosity, of a rhetorical finesse having acquired the ‘aura’ of the natural.

Baroque is another reason, “with its theatricalization of existence and its logic of ambivalence, is not merely another reason within modernity. Above all it is the *Reason of the Other*, of its overbrimming excess” (Buci-Glucksmann 1994, 39), a “proliferation of unfixable forms generating non-identity logics” (ibid., 132). The Baroque is an essentially analogical thought exploring the anarchic “line of flight”²⁷¹ from subsumptive, conceptual reason by following through the seriality afforded by resemblance and analogy, bringing to mind Ndalianis’s understanding of the Neobaroque as essentially juxtapositional rather than subordinating. Baroque reason thinks by way of paradoxes, oxymorons and ambivalence, revealing an ‘energetics’ of thought that

does not allow itself to be enclosed merely within the model of representation. This figural power of the stagings of otherness (of the divine, the feminine, or death) makes the invisible visible, giving symbolic form to all the realms of nature and supernature in an infinite play of ‘correspondences’ in Baudelaire’s sense of the term. This play offers itself for interpretation in the rhetorical and stylistic figure where opposites join together: in the oxymoron (ibid., 133).

The baroque is an ‘erotics’ of thought where opposites co-exist in irreducible tension - no synthesis in sight - productive of insights incommensurable with the usual categories of the understanding, incessantly provoking the sublime. As such, it is already ‘postmodern,’ predicated on the insight that things can be replicated infinitely in textures, images, words, conveying a “conception of reality in which the instability of forms in movement opens onto the reduplicated and reduplicable structure of all reality” (134). This ‘automatic’ replication engenders a de-centred reproducibility, a seriality in which materiality extends itself without the ‘force of gravity’ around which matter organizes itself: the idea is not there to organize materiality, which revels in its own ‘knowledge.’ The void is what ‘organizes’ baroque seriality, with materiality theatricalizing the absence of a grounding principle, evincing an excessive “erotics of nothing” through the “plethora of forms” (130). “By a kind of heretical-mystical and then baroque conversion, this ‘nothing of being’ changes into an infinity of ecstatic delight [*jouissance*]” (130). It is

²⁷¹ Todd May defines Deleuze’s concept of “line of flight” as “a flight within” reality which “does not create from nothing but rather experiments with a difference that is immanent to our world. There is always something more, more than we can know, more than we can perceive. The question before us, and it is a question of living, is whether we are willing to explore it, or instead are content to rest upon its surface” (May 2005, 170-71).

the nothing of the oxymoron: nothing is all. The void gives rise to infinity, to an oxymoronic ontology that can think radical difference - in its proliferating seriality - since the centre against which all meaning can be measured is absent, which is the same way as saying that everything can now serve as centre. The centre is nowhere; the centre is everywhere and everything: difference is the centre. It has no place: it is utopian. Yet, it is always already somewhere else: it is heterotopian.²⁷² Against the thinking of a centre, i.e., of classical thought that thinks in terms of substance - ontotheological thought - baroque reason “engages an infinite regress towards a point that is always slipping away, a pure otherness of figure” (134). For Buci-Glucksmann, Blaise Pascal is the exemplary thinker of radical difference: “In this world with no centre, no site, no fixed point of reference, ‘the centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere’: ‘the fixed point has become a point of view’ ... Pascal could welcome a thought of nothing (scientific vacuum or metaphysical-theological nothingness) and a thought of radical difference” (134, 136).

In its engagement with difference and the fragment that is not a unit within a larger signifying system, the baroque is equally the reason of allegory, which, through Walter Benjamin’s intervention. On Buci-Glucksmann’s interpretation, allegory finds its way back into modernity to activate the

Jetztzeit or ‘now-time’ of genuine actuality. To the empty linear time of the cumulative succession of events, Benjamin opposes the necessity of a temporal break, an interruption in time disclosed by the imaginaries of history. *Jetztzeit* is an intensive, qualitative time which becomes visible in ‘states of emergency,’ the moments when ‘culture engenders barbarism’ and the infinitely repressed memory of ‘those without a name’ (*Namenlosen*) finally reappropriates a history dominated by the historicism of the rulers (ibid., 44).

baroque reason, as the reason of the ‘other,’ is subaltern reason.²⁷³ It is the reason of the repressed, returning in the flash of an instant – *Jetztzeit*, the now pregnant with the future

²⁷² In Chapter 4 (4.2), I focus on Foucault’s notion of ‘heterotopia’ (1986) as it pertains to the exhibit of Latin American art, *Inverted Utopias*.

²⁷³ In this respect, Torres-García’s *Inverted Map* can be seen as a neobaroque engagement with the reason of the ‘other,’ in this case Inca-Hispanic cosmology. Such a reading goes directly against the ‘rhetoric of purity’ of constructive universalism, which condemned the mixture of the Incaic with the Spanish as

– to shatter the smooth continuum of a temporality covering over the plurivocality of subdued temporalities, histories, the marginalized. Baroque heterology engages the “polyrhythmic profundity of time” (46), against the unilateralism of the homogenizing time of modernist progress.²⁷⁴

It is within this conception of thought that antropofagia will envelop its own subalternization of modernity. As baroque reason, antropofagia is “the reason of utopia,” a no-space where the “baroque signifier proliferates beyond everything signified,” bringing “into play the infinite materiality of images and bodies” (139). Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will focus on how antropofagia evinces a baroque-ness in its singular engagement with word and image, legibility and visibility, forcing both into an infinite ‘dance’ (cf. Lyotard 2011) of irresolution, of inconstancy: a pedagogy of the “infinite relation” (cf. Foucault 1970) between word and image.

To Fold to Infinity

For Gilles Deleuze (1993), the fold is the operative device of the baroque insofar as it engages infinity. The fold is only properly baroque if it takes a stand on it. There have been folds before, but these stood not in a structural relation with the actuality of infinity, which was previously but a hypothetical for thought experiments. Matter gives body to infinity, as “the Baroque trait twists and turns its folds, pushing them to infinity, fold over fold, one upon the other. The Baroque fold unfurls all the way to infinity” (Deleuze 1993,

‘heretical,’ as a subversion of the integrity of the pre-Columbian tectonic vision. Again, Torres-García’s *modus operandi* is in direct contradiction with constructive universalism’s *modus significandi*, making the image much more generous in its Baroque accommodation of difference. For more on the disconnect between legibility and visibility, see Chapter 3 (3.2), where the mestizo visual substratum of the map is discussed.

²⁷⁴ In her subsequent publication, *La folie du voir* (1986), Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s expands on the rehabilitation of baroque reason and develops a critique of the Cartesian, disembodied spectator with the counter-model of embodied perception, elaborating on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to develop a baroque aesthetic of visibility.

3). Only the fold that knows infinity through a radical displacement of the centre - as Buci-Glucksmann has illustrated - is the truly baroque fold.

The Baroque fold evinces an affinity with the fractal,²⁷⁵ giving shape to infinity itself, as matter pleats and swirls, evading a stable point of rest, de-territorializing the fixity of a 'moored' spatiality, producing a baroque centrifugality that brings to mind Wölfflin's dynamic conception of the 'painterly style.'

Dividing endlessly, the parts of matter form little vortices in a maelstrom, and in these are found even more vortices, even smaller, and even more are spinning in the concave intervals of the whirls that touch one another. Matter thus offers an infinitely porous, spongy, or cavernous texture (6).

In its operative folding, the baroque questions the notion of historicity as a composition of punctual, clearly delimitable 'atoms' in time. "Fold after fold," the baroque always stretches "beyond its precise historical limits" (33). However, what gives the baroque fold its specificity is its formal inflection. The "formal element of the fold," its baroque essence "appears only with infinity, in what is incommensurable and in excess, when the variable curve supersedes the circle" (38).

This is consonant with Severo Sarduy's earlier thesis in *Barroco* (1974) that the baroque is inseparable from Johannes Kepler's discovery of the laws of planetary motion.²⁷⁶ According to Sarduy, Kepler did not just make a scientific 'discovery,' but inaugurated an ontological break in his positing that the route of the planets does not

²⁷⁵ Fractals assume paradigmatic status in the work of Lyotard, and in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) in particular, as a way of thematizing the seriality and infinite replication characteristic of post-modernity. Indeed, fractals "seem to provide evidence for [Lyotard's] belief that we can never aspire to a condition of complete knowledge of our world" (Sim 2010, 81). The self-reproduction of similarity, the structural *mise en abîme* of fractality can be seen as eminently baroque in its folding of planes of visibility, in the excess of ever-increasing pleatings of matter from one microscopic level to another, 'deeper' level, only to find enigmatic resemblances with the non-microscopic.

²⁷⁶ For Sarduy's reflection on the impact of the elliptical model on thought, the arts and architecture - and specifically concerning the anamorphic in painting, architecture and scientific (optical) theories, see Chapter 3 from *Barroco*, "Baroque Cosmology: Kepler." This text is now available in English in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup, eds., *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 292-315. The book was originally published in Spanish, cf. Severo Sarduy, *Barroco* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1974), with a French translation appearing soon after, cf. *Barroco*, trans. Jacques Henric (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975).

obey the rigour of the Aristotelian figure of perfection, i.e., the circle, but the changeability of the ellipse. The Baroque is an epoch of generalized decentering, a displacement that reverberates in the entire cultural sphere.²⁷⁷ As Sarduy writes in “The Baroque and the Neobaroque,”

The city decenters itself, loses its orthogonal structure and its natural signs of intelligibility - moats, rivers, walls; literature renounces its denotative level, its linear enunciation; the single center of the stars' orbits, previously supposed as circular, vanished, only to double itself when Kepler proposes the ellipse as the figure of this displacement; Harvey postulates the circulation of the blood; and finally, God himself no longer seems to be a central, unique, given, but rather the infinity of certainties of the personal *cogito*, dispersion, pulverization that announces the galactic world of monads (Sarduy 2010, 271).²⁷⁸

This displacement of the very notion of what space means, in that the world becomes newly visible as comprising multiple rather than one centripetal point of view from which the world can be surveyed (and mastered), is echoed in visual practices that give body to the multiplicity and difference inherent in vision, where the viewer now becomes a ‘moveable’ centre orbiting the painted surface, shapes going in and out of visibility with changes in position. Painting, architecture and sculpture emulate Kepler’s ‘off-centre,’ astronomical image, produce baroque artificialization through anamorphosis, and *trompe-l’oeil*, which convey a similar deconstruction of the signifying plane, engaging a multiplicity of perspectives in a hyper-spatial, ‘painterly’ organization of sculpture, architecture and painting (the ‘painterly painting’: a phrase brimming with baroque excess, the rhetoric of the pleonastic, of a ‘wasteful’ (a-)semiosis).²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Severo Sarduy traces an a-historical resemblance between the baroque and Kepler’s astronomy and the topicality of the Big Bang theory, as a way to point to a continuum between the scientific poetics of the Baroque and that of Neobaroque postmodernity as both come to terms with dispersal. The poetic image of the Big Bang - with its metaphoric economy of ‘fireworks,’ dispersal, movement and boundlessness - is echoed in postmodern cultural production. Speaking of Sarduy’s analogy between the Baroque and Neobaroque scientific imagination, to the latter “episteme corresponds an elliptical art of fragmentation and dispersal that, on the one hand is able to depict the cosmic expansion of the Big Bang’s ‘fuego originario,’ and on the other, is unable to localize the very origin of that expansion” (Pérez 2012, 45). For a detailed discussion on the relation between the figure of the ellipse and the Big Bang (and steady-state) theories Sarduy establishes, see Pérez 2012, 13-30; 109-158.

²⁷⁸ Severo Sarduy, “The Baroque and the Neobaroque,” in Zamora 2010, 270-291.

²⁷⁹ For a detailed discussion of Severo Sarduy’s characterizations of the anamorphic, the ellipse as ‘perverted circle’ and *trompe l’oeil*, see Rolando Pérez, *Severo Sarduy and the Neo-Baroque Image of Thought in the Visual Arts* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2012), 16-35. Anamorphosis

Sarduy's baroque is an "ontology of the surface" (Pérez 2012, 2002), it is a poetic metaphysics, a metaphysical poetics - the chiasmus of being - of "artificialization" (ibid., 272). This artifice of being is effected through substitution (Sarduy 2010, 272), proliferation (ibid., 273), condensation (ibid., 277), parody (ibid., 279), and quotation (282) and gives rise to a radical "process of masking, of progressive enveloping, of mockery" (272). In the field of writing, these tactics envelop one text into another, making language the parodic instrument of its own deconstruction: this "successive envelopment of one writing by another constitutes ... the Baroque itself" (272). The dominant "arborescent"²⁸⁰ image of thought, the hegemonic regime of legibility and visibility, is concerned with depth, utilizing a reading schema where things are defined as 'shallow,' or 'deep,' revealing a 'horizontalist' ontology where the surface, the facade, or skin is figured as the cover-up for a deeper, hidden essence. This image more or less coincides with Cheetham's notion of the "rhetoric of purity" (1991),²⁸¹ where the depth of the eidos is covered over by a facade: the materiality of the artwork. For Sarduy, as Rolando Pérez remarks, "surface is not the opposite of depth, but has a depth of its own" (Pérez 2012, 61).

and *trompe-l'oeil* have figured prominently in discussion of the baroque (focusing on the work of Borromini, Parmigianino, Giuseppe Arcimboldo and Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) just to name a few prominent names), and have been taken as emblems for the destabilization of the subject position associated with the postmodern. Jacques Lacan dubs anamorphosis an "exemplary structure" in the articulation of psychoanalytic theory and the constitutive role of distortion, and the otherness fracturing the self, the object always-already inhabiting the gaze of the subject (1977, 85). It is a dramatization of the non-identity between the eye and the gaze, an irreducible difference that reflects the split subject, fissured between seeing (subject) and seen (object), uncannily observed from an angle he/she can never inhabit, an enigmatic otherness holding out the threat of the dissolution of the symbolic. Furthermore, anamorphosis in painting serves to give a sense of what the irruption of the real - as that which annihilates the strict economy of signification - might look like, so to speak. As a heuristic device, Holbein's image gives shape - simulates - "the moment of the intervention of the real, the anamorphic moment that destroys the certainty of the picture," (Cousins in Adams 2003, 22) 'pictured,' in Holbein's case, in the guise of a skull, a 'ruin' of the body intimating biological death, the truth of the "general economy" of semiosis that gestures to the ultimate groundlessness of meaning. For a discussion of Walter Benjamin and the death as the limit and condition of possibility of allegory, and the relation of allegory to the work of Torres-García, see Chapter 1 (1.1). For (Derrida's reading of) Bataille's concept of "general economy," see Chapter 2 (2.1).

²⁸⁰ In Chapter 2 (2.4), I discuss Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "arborescent thought" - and Damisch's appropriation of the term - as it is figured in Torres-García's theory of grafismo.

²⁸¹ For Mark Cheetham's view on the "rhetoric of purity" (1991) of abstraction, see Chapter 1 (1.1).

In the chapters that follow, I will explore infinity as it pertains to antropofagia's folding of surfaces of legibility and visibility, as an exploration of Michel Foucault's intuition - prompted by his discussion of Diego Velázquez's baroque image *Las Meninas* (1656) - that "the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation" (Foucault 1970, 10). What will concern me in the following three chapters is the 'infinite relation' between legibility and visibility, the incessant imbrication of the reading eye with the viewing eye as it pertains to the "manifesto Antropófago" and *Abaporu*. The unstable imagetext that the juxtaposition of both incites attests to Deleuze's remark that "the Baroque invents the infinite work or process. The problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, ... how to bring it to infinity" (Deleuze 1993, 34). My analysis is intended as a way to further unfold and refold the thick visibility and legibility at work in the manifesto and the sketch, and to take part in the 'dance' of the seeable and the sayable (cf. Lyotard 2011, 9) of their materiality.²⁸² However, before turning to the texts and images, I will provide a short sketch of the Neobaroque in its New World guise.

What is Neobaroque?

What, then, besides an a-historical reiteration of a techno-poetics as Ndalianis proposes, makes neobaroque 'new'? Why does 'baroque' not suffice, why this 'baroquing' of a concept, and its further baroquing into names such as 'hyper-', 'ultra-' as Cabranes-Grant (2010) asks, so sensibly? Asking the question - much like the question 'What is Baroque?' - is of course already to give away part of the answer. There is no *need*, since the baroque resists the 'restricted economy,' the austerity, of classical conceptual architectonics. However, to claim that the baroque performs its own excess - caught in a strange, magical (realist) performative non-contradiction - is to sidestep the question so as to simulate that the question has been understood. Since the question has been posed before, the answers must be taken into account as part of the rhetorical virtuosity of what constitutes the Neobaroque: the question has historical depth, and a specificity of its own.

²⁸² On the notion of the 'dance' of the figural as Lyotard frames it, see Chapter 2 (2.3).

Addressing literature, Gonzalo Celorio maintains that the difference between the baroque and the neobaroque is that the latter is self-consciously baroque, evincing a

deliberate intention of articulating a discourse that includes elements characteristic of Baroque aesthetics - especially parody. Perhaps a difference between the Baroque writers of the seventeenth century and the Neobaroque writers of our times is that the former did not know that they were Baroque, whereas the latter do. And how! ... Neobaroque writers ... are aware of their affinities with Baroque aesthetics and self-consciously exercise their wit and ingenuity (Celorio 2010, 503).

My study is not concerned with intentionality. To intend is classical, to disperse is (neo)baroque: one cannot intend dispersal - it occurs contingently.²⁸³ I see intentionality as a discourse that makes the baroque undergo another movement, a further layering that inserts another pleat within an ever-expanding imagetext, bringing us to the moment that we now make visible and legible as ‘neobaroque.’ It is this Neobaroque writing of intentionality that in a sense created the baroque as a point of departure, as a beginning. The baroque is the effect of the neobaroque, revealing time’s double articulation, its “retombée,” a concept coined by Sarduy and which he characterizes - following the oxymoronic lines of flight of Baroque Reason (Glucksmann 1994) - as “achronic causality, non-contiguous isomorphism, or the consequence of something that has not yet been produced, resemblance with something that for the moment does not yet exist” (Sarduy 1975, 7; my translation). I will explore Tarsila’s reminiscences in the following section of this chapter (5.2.1), as well as take a closer look at Varejão’s statement of artistic intent I started this introduction with. The latter reverberates with other texts, and enters into a constellation of correspondences with other texts and images without a definite centre by which to measure the ‘truth’ of her claims. Through its visual-verbal

²⁸³ Ndalianis bases her notion of the Neo-Baroque on a similar understanding of intentionality. As she observes, what “distinguishes earlier phases of the twentieth-century baroque from its current guise is the reflexive desire to revisit the visuality associated with the era of the historical baroque. The ‘baroque baroque’ deliberately reintroduced variations of seventeenth-century fashion, theatrical, and architectural designs, grand-scale spectacle, and baroque historical narratives in the context of the cinema, theater, and ballet” (Ndalianis 2004, 17). By contrast, I believe that Baroque, in its movement toward indiscernibility, problematized the idea of intentionality, making it diffuse and to some extent incoherent through its condensation of historical layers. From that perspective, intention and the notion of the discrete, Cartesian subject that it presupposes (as centripetal locus of clear and distinct ideas, including historical epochs), is folded to infinity.

voracity - its principled virtuosity and erudition - the (neo)baroque disarranges historicity.

Reading Deleuze through Sarduy, I take the Neobaroque as the radicalization of the ontology of the surface. Sarduy anchors his discussion of the Neobaroque in the Lacanian notion of lack, which sees in baroque excess and overabundance a cover-up for the absence of an ideational centre, of an ultimate signified that would guarantee the consistency of the fabric of meaning of all signifiers:

the contemporary Baroque, the Neobaroque, reflects structurally the disharmony, the rupture of homogeneity, of the logos as an absolute, the lack that constitutes our epistemic foundation. Neobaroque of disequilibrium, structural reflection of a desire that cannot attain its object, a desire for which the logos has organized only a screen to conceal this lack (Sarduy 2010, 289).

This understanding of the neobaroque still attributes a certain logic to its material unfolding: its intent is to cover, to dissimulate the secret it wears on its sleeve. In my reading of antropofagia, the neobaroque will appear as that which *produces* its own multiple ‘secrets,’ not to be held together by a concept - such as ‘lack’ - that still pretends to speak the ultimate truth, as if the (neo)baroque is the de-historicized exemplification of a theoretical position. Antropofagia is not negative theology: its material overabundance is not the symptom of a deeper, underlying truth, even if that truth turns out to be empty.

In “On the Baroque,”²⁸⁴ Jacques Lacan opens up the baroque to the radical immanence of the neobaroque, obliquely questioning his ontotheology of the lack through a consideration of the dogma of the incarnation, which is not so much expressive of a spiritual as it is of a materialist ethos. Not driven by the restricted economy of reproduction, “having nothing to expect from copulation” but everything from an excessive *jouissance*, in Christianity “the work of art show[s] itself as what it has been in all places - obscenity” (Lacan 1998, 113). Speaking in his characteristic voice trembling with neobaroque irony, Lacan asks

²⁸⁴ Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (New York: Norton, 1998), 95-117.

of what importance can it be in Christian doctrine that Christ have a soul? That doctrine speaks only of the incarnation of God in a body, and assumes that the passion suffered in that person constituted another person's *jouissance*. But there is nothing lacking here, especially not a soul. Christ, even when resurrected from the dead, is valued for his body, ... In everything that followed from the effects of Christianity, particularly in art - and it's in this respect that I coincide with the 'baroquism' with which I accept to be clothed - everything is exhibition of the body evoking *jouissance* (ibid.).²⁸⁵

The neobaroque lacks for nothing; the transcendence of a soul, of substance or the Idea does not circulate within its a-semiotic circuit, except as part of its body of writing and imaging. There is no excess that covers up an absence; it is the folding of materiality - images, texts, artefacts - that works itself out, diagrammatically, and not as symptomatology. At this point Deleuze's baroque and Lacan's meet. As a radical ontology of surface-intensities, the neobaroque is no longer concerned with the transcendent, not even the illusion of transcendence the baroque might have entertained in its covering over of the lack, of a receding, contested God (as a name for the ultimate signified).

This also means that the pathos of mourning of the baroque allegory, as signalled by Walter Benjamin (1977), no longer holds for the neobaroque. Mourning becomes the imprint of a baroque history onto the facade of the neobaroque; it adds a new material crease the neobaroque can work with, deconstruct, and parody. Mourning becomes part of the repertoire of the "infinite work" (Deleuze 1993, 34), into the play *with* mourning. Significant in this respect is Fernando R. de la Flor's questioning of the imposition of the "psychological economy of sadness" (Flor 2005, 6), which resulted in a skewed view of history that entered the canon through the elite "theo-poets of that time," in spite of the epoch's "tendency to manifest the burlesque, the festive, or the ludicrous" (ibid.). This image of melancholia, of *tristitia*, has become the shibboleth through which the baroque is now read and viewed. Taking a topos as expressive of deep historical truth, as the ontological mood of an age, the possibility of (guilt-free) laughter is relegated to the

²⁸⁵ Incidentally, this might be the most eloquent definition of antropofagia, in that it fleshes out and inverts the doctrine of transubstantiation. Antropofagia is only concerned with bodies, immanence and materiality, and how these constitute fluxes in legibility and visibility.

margins. In fact, de la Flor points out that the equation of the baroque with an “epochal anxiety” - as “model of intelligibility” (ibid., 5) - has a genealogy of its own, i.e., nineteenth century historiography (cf. ibid.). Moreover, melancholia has “classic prestige,” and is now a cover concept which an entire age supposedly ‘exemplifies,’ “as if it were its most precise and exclusive emblem” (ibid., 3).

This tension between the classical, restrictive semiotic economy of mourning - where any object can (or should) function as a potential *memento mori* - and the principle of dispersal inherent in the fragment, informed Walter Benjamin’s dialectic conception of baroque allegory. Walter Benjamin sees allegory as a means to ‘sanctify’ the proliferation of analogies and resemblances into a (fragmented, precarious) whole, as a means to endow materiality with transcendence, which keeps alive the concomitant hope of redemption (as extrication from the base, creaturely condition), and the mourning that comes with that fading hope. Benjamin sees the baroque as a historical ethos that combats the mournful demise of inherent meaning through an allegorical resacralization of the ruin. However, he recognizes the proliferating potential of analogy, of the world of profane things that threatens to engulf the consistency of the world as a structure of (sacred) signification. In the *Trauerspiel*,

Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. With this possibility a destructive but just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance. But it will be unmistakably apparent, especially to anyone who is familiar with allegorical textual exegesis, that all of the things which are used to signify derive from the very fact of their pointing to something else, a power which makes them appear no longer commensurable with profane things, which raises them onto a higher plane, and which can, indeed, sanctify them (Benjamin 1977, 175).

With the neobaroque, meaning becomes radically indeterminate through the superimposition of visibilities and legibilities. The neobaroque is then the de-sanctification of allegory. It involves the magnification of the detail into fractal reduplications, and the radicalization of a decentering poetics of visual-verbal analogy. It is a praxis of the proliferation of overlappings where anything can indeed mean anything else (and where everything looks like something else), putting the seeable and articulable as such in question.

Neobaroque combinatorics inserts mourning and nostalgia in its material repertoire. Lack, mourning, nostalgia: in antropofagia, these all morph into polemical ploys, means of erudition to laugh off the colonist's melancholia through the irreverent guffaw of neobaroque counterconquests. In my reading of Oswald's "Anthropophagite Manifesto," in Chapter 6, I hope to show how the text deconstructs the narcissistic elevation of the *Abendland* through its pathos of melancholia and loss. The manifesto shows how hegemonic melancholia is, quite literally, a *problème de luxe*, a malaise that cannot be extricated from coloniality. Redemption is a European dream: "what does that have to do with us?," Oswald would ask (Andrade 1991, 41). Antropofagia does not await the intervention of the melancholic "angel of history" (Benjamin 2003). History has no angels except as a rhetorical fold; the hope for redemption is a narrative told 'over there,' in Europe - and 'over here' Oswald is cheekily invoking Spengler and the rhetoric of European pessimism - transporting, in their caravels, not crusaders but "fugitives from a civilization we are eating" (Andrade 1991, 41). Antropofagia devours its angels, its Christ, incorporating their redemption in a profane Eucharist without (spiritual) resurrection: only insurrection will do.

In its polemicism, antropofagia evinces a New World baroque attitude of counterconquest. As a parodic inversion of the Counter-Reformation,²⁸⁶ José Lezama Lima's concept of counterconquest names the complex routes of identification and dis-identification of cultural production in the 'South.'

²⁸⁶ As Salgado (1999) remarks, "Lezama Lima here both modifies and parodies Werner Weisbach's famous discussion of the baroque as the 'art of the Counter-Reformation'" (323). Cf. Werner Weisbach, *Der barock als Kunst der Gegenreformation* (Berlin: P. Cassirer, 1921).

New World Baroque and Neobaroque Counterconquest

This recuperation of the baroque through neobaroque theory has a complex history of its own, testifying to the unexpected routes of coloniality. As César Augusto Salgado points out, it was the influence of the work of art historians - and the ‘hybridization’ of their discourse through archaeology and ethnology²⁸⁷ - that prepared the ground for neobaroque theory to flourish, making the neobaroque, at its ‘origin,’ as the site of South American specificity, a new fold in an infinite body of work:

Lezama Lima, Carpentier, and Sarduy were especially receptive to the conflation of European art history principles with New World archaeology and ethnography which distinguished postwar works on colonial art and architecture by Manuel Toussaint, George Kubler, and Pál Kelemen. In these works a similar debate about an autochthonous and hybrid ‘Latin American baroque’ was made in regard to the plastic arts (Salgado 1999, 320).

Kelemen’s *Baroque and Rococo in Latin America* (1951) in particular was influential in the development of New World baroque theory and its reversal of valuation. “Kelemen’s evaluation of the American transformation of the European baroque was both unusual and attractive because it was made from the perspective of an Old World art scholar turned New World ethnographer” (ibid., 320). The American baroque was no longer presented as the degenerate outgrowth of the Renaissance transplanted onto the New World. Instead, the American baroque - and the New World in general - was to be regarded as “the site where the moribund European model will be preserved and transformed as it is ‘infused with a new blood’” (ibid., 321).

The poetics of *mestizaje* and transfusion was subsequently used against this Eurocentric model. Instead of a displaced European style, Lezama Lima made the baroque visible and legible as the site of the displacement and subversion of Europe.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ In a way, the birth of the Neobaroque is a reprise of the birth of the ‘historical avant-garde’ and its ethnographic predisposition. For more details on James Clifford’s notion of “ethnographic surrealism” (1988), and Torres-García’s ‘ethnographic abstraction’ as a meeting point of artistic experimentation, ethnography and archeology, see Chapter 2 (2.1 and 2.2), as well as Chapter 1 (1.3).

²⁸⁸ I am relying on the French translation of *La expresión Americana*, i.e., José Lezama Lima, *L’expression Américaine* (Paris: l’Harmattan, 2001). The book was initially published as *La expresión americana y otros ensayos* (Montevideo: Arca, 1969). Chapter 2 of the book, “Baroque Curiosity,” is now available in English in Zamora 2010, 212-240.

The baroque amounts to a subterranean counterconquest, a camouflaged heresy where mestizo artists “‘insert alien symbols’ into the cosmological construct of the Spanish baroque” (ibid., 323). Tension, and not synthesis is what defines the New World Baroque. I will be relying on Lezama Lima’s notion of counterconquest, as well as Alejo Carpentier’s understanding of the Baroque as evincing a profound affinity with New World fauna and flora. For Carpentier, the baroque is a transhistorical dynamic that makes visible analogies and resemblances between the known and the unknown, between being and representation: “We were always baroque and we have to continue being baroque, for a very simple reason: in order to define, paint, determine a new world, unknown trees, incredible vegetation, immense rivers, one is always being baroque” (qtd. in Moraña 2005, 246). The imbrication of culture and nature, the artificiality of nature as refracted through the visibility of the baroque, transforms Havana not just in a city, but also a forest of columns,²⁸⁹ of trunks and foliage providing shelter with their

excess of Doric and Corinthian, Ionic and composite capitals, ... making the pedestrian forget that he lived among columns, that he was accompanied by columns and observed by columns that measured his stride and protected him from wind and rain, and that he was even watched over by columns in his dreams (Carpentier 2005, 257).

Baroque ‘artificialization’ (Sarduy) is equally the ‘naturing’ of artifice, and it is this ambiguity that will prove central to antropofagia’s ‘mood.’²⁹⁰ It is this ‘baroque legibility’ that folds itself within the landscape and the colonial, urban spaces that will inform antropofagia’s stance, at least in my reading. Generally speaking, Lezama Lima, Sarduy and Carpentier will prove instrumental in my discussion of the superimposed legibilities and visibilities antropofagia puts into circulation, as a polemical tactic of appropriation and de-appropriation. In addition, their appropriation of the Barroco Mineiro signals the beginning of Brazilian modernism, and simultaneously the start of a neobaroque *modus operandi*.

²⁸⁹ I am referring to Alejo Carpentier’s “The City of Columns” (in Zamora 2010, 244-258)

²⁹⁰ It is noticeable in Mário de Andrade’s *Macunaima* (1928), where the eponymous hero travels to São Paulo, his senses assaulted by new technologies he makes visible (and legible to the reader) in terms of tropical fauna and flora familiar to his interpretable horizon. The effect is a poetic and ludic techno-ecological estrangement.

Anthropophagic Diagrammatology and the Neobaroque Beginning without Origin

If, as Octavio Paz maintains, “the search for a future inevitably leads to the reconquest of a past” (qtd. in Zamora 2009, 128), then antropofagia’s *Reconquista* refers to the appropriation of the Baroque of Minas Gerais with an eye to the future and the modernization of Brazil. This reconquest is a polemical ‘counterconquest’ (Lezama Lima), set against the history of coloniality - it is a critical rejoinder to European modernization, a ‘tropicalization’ of instrumental reason - but formulated from the position of the colonial baroque as ambiguous interspace between revolution and subjugation. As I will show in Chapter 6, antropofagia is equally the ‘baroquing’ of the ‘historical avant-garde’ in that it makes palpable a history of subalternization as well as hegemonic revolutionary discourses that offer redemption in exchange for orthodoxy. Antropofagia is in this respect also markedly different from the messianic fervour of constructive universalism. While the latter proposes a programmatic salvage of the pre-Columbian as a means to redeem a materialist humanity, antropofagia makes the distinction between the pre- and post-Columbian slide into indiscernibility. Dissent is what antropofagia finds in the colonial baroque of Minas Gerais, in stark opposition to constructive universalism, which deems the baroque irrelevant. Constrained by the ideology of purity, Torres-García can only read the baroque ruins as testifying to the illegitimate, decadent bastardization of an originary, pre-Columbian (abstract), Andean purity of geometric ideality (cf. Torres-García 1992, 55-57; 63-66; 70-74; 75-80; 168-170). For antropofagia, there is only the impurity of the baroque, and the baroque is the development of the surface according to its own laws of contingent dispersal.

Antropofagia, unlike other avant-garde discourses, does not proclaim a historical break: its radicalism lies in its historicity and the erudition that comes with its citational ethos. In this chapter, I will use Silviano Santiago’s distinction between origin and beginning, as well as Walter Benjamin’s notion of the ‘primal leap’ as a way into antropofagia’s convoluted, contradictory engagement with what it perceives as its ‘proper’ past. Chapter 6 focuses on the regimes of visibility and legibility that gave rise to the European image of the concept of the cannibal, and the ways in which antropofagia deterritorializes the regime of intelligibility it carries with it. In Chapter 7, I will expand

on these reflections and show how the constellation of *Abaporu* and the “Manifesto Antropófago” puts the notion of origin and primordality in question and explores a “beginning without origin” (Moraña 2005, 259).

What unites these chapters - and this work as a whole for that matter - is my concern with the heuristic of the image-word relation. My methodology is diagrammatological, and attempts to work out the visual and the verbal in their constitutive interweaving. Diagrammatology is an attempt - and it can be no more than an attempt, since exemplification always slips in - to resist the logic of the example that all too often subordinates the image to the propositional truths of discourse. My readings/viewings marshal the anarchic potential of visual-verbal analogy, and as such, it formulates itself in counterpoint to an overly conceptual understanding of allegory, even if it is held together by a ‘weak messianism’ of hope, mourning and redemption found in the work of Benjamin. For this, I found my inspiration in Barbara Maria Stafford’s *Visual Analogy* (1999), although this book tellingly omits any mention of Benjamin’s dialectical conception of allegory, since its inclusion might have disrupted the stark opposition between allegory and analogy it proposes. In my formulation of diagrammatology, Gregory L. Ulmer’s observations have proven especially fruitful. In combination with Nikolaus Gangsterer’s work, it helped me formulate a reading/viewing strategy I have termed ‘emblematics,’ as praxis that will do justice to antropofagia’s infinite refolding of visibilities and legibilities.

5.2 *Abaporu*, Antropofagia and Baroque ‘Discoveries’: Sites/Sights and Citations of Origin

5.2.1 *Abaporu*: Birth Scene of Antropofagia

The opening scene, the ‘Nativity’ of the neo-baroque avant-garde movement of *antropofagia* is set in a bourgeois-bohemian household in São Paulo. It recounts the almost mythical story of the origin of *modernismo*, or rather, the consolidation, in 1928, of the various avant-garde experiments in Brazil (as sketched in 2.1) around the figure of the *cannibal*. The story has gained legendary proportion – and has become somewhat of a founding myth – through the frequency with which it is recounted in discussions of Brazilian modernism. In a sense, it reprises the mythos that has formed around the date of 1922, as the magical digit indicating when art turned modern, almost overnight. The 1928 movement of *antropofagia* explored the full implications of what the 1922 event could only intimate through an eclectic reframing of European Modernism, the latter a symbolic declaration of a desire to move in synch with a global avant-garde. This new inaugural event shows the equivocation of ‘rupture’ attendant on this desire to be in synch. It shows how the ‘new’ could only be effected through a leap back into the past, of a resumption of what had always been in place but had hitherto gone undetected. The Brazilian avant-garde is not concerned with the rupture with tradition. Antropofagia is the marshalling of a specific, neglected tradition against the legacy of European academicism, and in doing so, it equally exposes the European avant-garde’s fantasy of an absolute, new origin. Through its subversive citational ethos, *antropofagia* is outspokenly neo-baroque, as outlined in the introductory section “What is Baroque?” It is in this sense, that, following Haroldo de Campos, the “anthropophagic way of thinking can be thought of as an anticipatory, through crude, form of deconstructionism” (Campos 2001, 376).



Figure 5.6 Tarsila do Amaral, *Abaporu*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 85 x 73 cm. Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires. Fundación Costantini, Buenos Aires. [Bonet 2009, 30].

So, here we are, in São Paulo. It is 1928, and it is Oswald de Andrade's birthday. He receives a present from his wife, Tarsila do Amaral. It is a painting (figure 5.6). Oswald is shocked and overawed. He experiences an epiphany. The painting prompts a conversion. Anthropophagy is born. Now it is time to spread the good tidings all over Brazil and beyond. Oswald calls his friend and poet Raul Bopp to share his joy – or his “horror” (cf. below) as other accounts have it – and pledge allegiance to the image, in an act of idolatrous faithfulness that would generate an entire intellectual and artistic movement. “Anthropophagy is what unites us all,” Oswald would write ([1928] 1991, 38)

in his anthropophagite manifesto, intimating the sardonic ideal of an all-consuming *communitas*. In the memoir “Pau-Brasil and Anthropophagite Painting,” first published eleven years after the initial shock, Tarsila recalls that

The Anthropophagite movement of 1928 had its origins in my canvas *Abaporu*, cannibal: a solitary, monstrous figure with immense feet sitting on a green plane, one bent arm resting on its knee, the hand supporting the tiny featherweight head. In the foreground, a cactus bursting into an absurd flower. That canvas was sketched on January 11, 1928. Oswald de Andrade and Raul Bopp were both shaken when they saw *Abaporu* and spent a long time looking at it. Both very imaginative, they felt that an important intellectual movement could come of this (Amaral 2009 [1939], 32).²⁹¹

Tarsila’s ekphrastic scene moves from a description of the canvas, to the recognition of a feeling of someone being ‘all shook up’ after an act of concentrated viewing - ‘for a long time’ - at the canvas. Then, Tarsila – narrating as eye-witness - identifies a new feeling brought about by the imagination of the onlookers in confrontation with the image – a new feeling is ascribed to the viewers of *Abaporu*, a feeling that is interpreted in terms of a premonition – retrospectively validated at the time of the text’s publication (by 1939 Tarsila was a renowned artist in Brazil) and by art history – that “an important intellectual movement would come of it.” The canvas is narrated as a vehicle for an epiphany, a canvas upon which an entire history will be written that traces the initial affective burst of this encounter. It is the painting that is given the responsibility of having conjured an ‘important intellectual movement,’ or rather, it is in the perceptive act that meaning is located, a meaning that will come to colour the image. It is as if aesthetic reflection and the contemplation of a ‘monstrous figure’ and an ‘absurd flower’ put motion an unexpected meaning that would bear the name *antropofagia* – a name burdened with a history of colonial violence. However, that is not to say that the conceptual infrastructure was not already ‘in the air’ in Brazil and elsewhere; it did however find its definite formulation in Brazil with *antropofagia* as a master concept. In order to come to terms with the image *Abaporu* and what came before it, namely the 1924 Pau-Brasil movement and The Week of Modern Art of 1922, conceptual and

²⁹¹ Tarsila do Amaral, “Pau-Brasil and Anthropophagite Painting (1939),” in Bonet 2009, 30-33.

pictorial machinery is put into play to capture and channel its energy: manifestoes and novels are written, music is composed, paintings are made all under the sign of *antropofagia*. At least, this is what appears in retrospect, this is the fantasy that now imposes itself forcefully, namely the illusion of an absolute beginning in the image – the substitution of one founding myth for another; not ‘in the beginning was the word,’ but in the beginning was the image, the idol, *Abaporu*.

Through the rhetoric of retrospection, Tarsila figures the encounter with the “monstrous figure” on the canvas – a kind of tropical-primitivist parody of Rodin’s more cerebral *Thinker* – as the necessary moment in the history of Brazilian art, an inevitable event to the extent that it now helps the discourse of art history account for artistic production in the Brazil of the here and now. Tarsila seems to prepare this moment for inscription within art history, in which this fortuitous meeting of painting and viewer could not have happened otherwise given its outcome: the anthropophagite movement is now deemed essential to the articulation of a truly Brazilian culture,²⁹² and this is the moment when everything became different – it prompecomes a moment of revelation. Today, everywhere traces are found of this anthropophagite aesthetic in the Brazilian cultural sphere: its forerunners are identified, as well as its offspring.²⁹³ In the beginning was *antropofagia*: Brazil is now always already descended from *antropofagia*. As such, Tarsila’s words already addressed the loss of contingency by pointing forward to its future institutionalization: the word – be it *Abaporu* or *antropofagia* – now has legitimating force.

Notwithstanding its having become a locus of inevitability, Tarsila’s words do preserve a certain sense of indeterminacy between the past, present, and future: there is still a certain *je ne sais quoi*, a certain mystery as to what sparked the painting, and to what prompted the naming of the painting and what would ultimately come of it. Indeed,

²⁹² Cf. Schwartz (2000), Campos (2001; 2007), Bonet (2009), et al. Most accounts of Brazilian literature and the arts foreground the importance of the antropofagia movement in the articulation of a specifically Brazilian cultural consciousness.

²⁹³ For instance, in a revision of Brazilian literature, Augusto de Campos puts forward Gregório de Matos (1636-1696) – the Bahian master of colonial Baroque satire, nicknamed ‘Boca do Inferno’ – as “the first experimental cannibal in our poetry” (qtd. in Haroldo de Campos 2007, 165). Antropofagia thus provided a new paradigm through which previous literary and artistic activity could be re-read in creative ways.

in another text, Tarsila stresses the unexpectedness of *Abaporu*, and the artist's lack of mastery over her own creative act, where intelligibility and words fail to account for the construction of this uncanny figure: "From me emerged a monstrous picture that even I didn't know how I had done it, nor why I had done it. It seemed somewhat monstrous to me. It was a little, tiny head with those enormous feet, sitting on a green surface" (qtd. in Bonet 2009, 243).

Following this line of thought one could formulate the hypothesis that the monstrosity of the figure not so much resides on the level of figuration, although one could still ask oneself what exactly it is on the level of representation that merits the title. Instead, the 'monstrosity' might refer to a failing of language, of having given birth to something outside of one's conceptual powers, as though the figure had been painted completely *ex nihilo*, and is therefore utterly contingent. In short, *Abaporu* is monstrous because it is a miracle, its emergence located outside the strictures of space-time and causality. In this scene of birth without progenitors, in this absolute origin, the image is forged completely outside of agency, resulting from an act where the artist is no longer the *author*, but a medium, situated somewhere between the romantic ideal of the Genius – the sounding board of divine inspiration – and *écriture/peinture automatique* – a kind of 'machinic' configuration painting the 'I know not what.' It seems that Tarsila's body, her hands, her eyes, her gestures and movements 'knew' something that Tarsila – as *cogito* – did not. Her statement suggests that it is in the suspension of knowing that *Abaporu* was made. Rather, it was not even made, it simply *emerged* as she puts it – the painting was made by nature. Never having been conceived, *Abaporu* is the simulation of Rodin's *Thinker*; with a hand and a gigantic foot planted firmly into the ground: the cannibal is the embodiment of a *route* to thinking, back into the ground that nourished it.

Despite what Tarsila's memoir seems to suggest, the anthropophagite movement was of course not born solely out of an act of looking. The act itself is already embedded within a pictorial-scriptural economy, and this will give the codification and interpretation of that looking a certain direction; the gaze already comes with a certain affinity. *Abaporu* is not an image that makes everything new, but an image that inscribes itself within a context. Indeed, this might point to another possible interpretation of

‘monstrosity’: the monstrosity Tarsila sees in the image, its mystery, might lie in the colonial heritage that is at work, something that is not fully conscious, given the nonchalance of one telling detail, as if it required no further reflection – namely the scene where the provenance of the name *Abaporu* is brought to light. In a text published in 1950 for a retrospective of her work in São Paulo, Tarsila reiterates the monstrosity of the image, and the “horror” it provoked in its first onlookers. Naming seems the only recourse to quiet the “terror of the uncertain sign” (cf. Barthes) on the canvas. The image is anchored through the title ‘Abaporu.’

Oswald de Andrade, who, when he looked at that monstrous figure with its colossal feet set squarely on the ground, called Raul Bopp to share with him the horror he felt. In front of this painting, which they called Abaporu – cannibal – the two of them decided to create an artistic and literary movement rooted in the land of Brazil (Amaral [1950], in Schwartz 2000, 540-41).

The horror, the monstrosity of unintelligibility attendant on that which has no name and is not (yet) recognizable, is doubly territorialized. First, the act of naming provides the image with a clear ‘frame’ and designation; the image is inserted into discourse, it becomes part of a tabulation, a schema of sorts. The image is signified; its affective force is subdued and made to circulate in a new conceptual constellation. Secondly, this discourse is nationalist: it makes the figure legible through a telluric-political perspective, thus irrevocably binding it to the locus of enunciation of its modernist ‘masters.’ *Abaporu* constitutes the frontline of Brazilian art, ‘rooted’ in the soil, an autochthonous presence in ‘the land of Brazil,’ making a collective – a ‘movement’ – possible. “This *looks like* a cannibal, a man of the land” is how Raul Bopp and Oswald produce resemblance based on historic, colonial accounts associating the coasts of Brazil with Tupi cannibalism (Bonet 2009, 243; my emphasis).²⁹⁴ The ‘looks like’ signals that naming is not a spontaneous act, but bespeaks coloniality. Tarsila’s account, despite its seeming

²⁹⁴ The operation of analogy, of something looking like something else, constructs new routes of resemblance and difference, routes that will animate the legibilities that cluster around it. It is the rhetoric of the eye that makes visibility possible, as Jacques Rancière (2008) observes in his critique of Deleuze’s phenomenological eye (as it is blind to the regime of legibility that makes its ‘immediate’ seeing possible). For more on the distribution of the sensible in terms of regimes of legibility and visibility, see the General Introduction. In the Conclusion I broach the anarchy of ‘free association’ and the de-structuring force of a-semiosis it carries with it, an anarchic flow that is ‘anchored’ through the intervention of a master concept which retrospectively gives meaning to the associative series.

transparency, actually highlights the paradox of the process of *Abaporu*'s naming. Indeed, the name is expressly that which does not *emerge* unproblematically 'out of the soil,' but is *constructed* with the help of an ethnographic tool, a Tupi-Guarani dictionary. This makes 'the land' highly ambiguous. In order to signify *Abaporu*'s belonging to the soil of Brazil, the modernists expose their own fundamental non-belonging, their position as usurpers in trying to reanimate a dying language. In anchoring the image, they must take instruction from a pedagogical tool, a tool that moreover had a clear missionary intent. Modernist discourse is thus de-territorialized through its own act of naming. Instead of the name taking possession of the image, *Abaporu* dispossess their 'makers.'

The dictionary highlights modernism's own distance from the land, from Pindorama, the Tupi name that designates the territory of Brazil – "country or region of palm trees" – where the Tupinambá had settled prior to the arrival of the Portuguese (cf. Andrade 1991, 47 n28). "Bopp, upon seeing that still-untitled work, tells Oswald, 'We're going to build a movement around this picture.' Flipping through the Tupi-Guarani dictionary they baptize it 'aba' (man) and 'poru' (who eats)" (Bonet 2009, 83). The name is not vernacular, it is not proper to Tarsila – it effects a spacing between speech and visibility. The name appears as a ready-made, viz. an entry in the dictionary, making the name a 'found object,' a glottographic transcription of a dying language. "I looked in an old dictionary that my father had given me by Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, a Jesuit who had written a dictionary of the Tupi-Guarani language. And I found 'a-ba-po-ru,' 'man who eats man,' and I gave it this name" (qtd. in Bonet 2009, 243). In the gap – the blank so to speak – between viewing and thinking, a name is born and conferred onto the image. Through the name, the image is legible as cannibal, as *Abaporu*. The name derives from the technology of writing, an operation inherited from a European patriarchal tradition, much like Tarsila inherited the dictionary from her father. The painting can only be named through an inheritance, the dictionary of an eradicated language that no longer has speaking bodies, except through regurgitation. It is a speech reconstructed through writing, as alien to the cosmopolitan, São Paulo intellectual as its sonority was to the tool capturing its supposed grammatical and phonetic laws. The dictionary functioned as a device in the forced conversion of the Tupinambá, with the Tupi-Portuguese glossary as a way to translate *Abaporu* into the mono-onto-theological time of Catholicism and

Cartesianism.²⁹⁵ *Abaporu* is a defiant regurgitation, making visible, through its paradoxical naming, the compression of a history that will now begin the de-catechization of the South and the inauguration of, to recall Raul Bopp's phrase, the "de-Vespucci-ated and de-Columbus-ed America" (qtd. in Madureira 2005, 22), by the very means inherited from coloniality. *Abaporu* is ventriloquism: it names the point where image, speech, writing and the stomach intersect – an overdetermined nexus of coloniality, the locus where scriptural-pictorial economies, mercantile history and the migration of (luxury) goods, slaves and global capital meet, as well as the nostalgia for Pindorama, the land of palm trees, prior to its transformation, through order and progress, into the brazilwood nation state.

The question becomes how to imagine the linking and re-linking between what is said and what is seen, of what precisely is taking place in the *décalage* – in the temporal and spatial intervals of looking, seeing, reading, thinking and imagining. This relinking is also at stake in Tarsila's recounting of the origin of *antropofagia*. A paratactic reformulation of the unveiling of *Abaporu* leaves the responsibility of imagining possible connections between the sayable and the visible to the reader: 'to see, to shake, to look, to imagine, to feel, to think, and then, *Abaporu*, and then *antropofagia*.' The intervals leave room for images to take over; it is the unsaid that binds these words, it is in this breathing room that *Abaporu* takes on life and meaning. The rhythm of intervals is also played out on the level of the movement itself. Antropofagia, as an avant-garde constellation, thrives on the tension between past, present and future, between possibility, the now, and

²⁹⁵ José de Anchieta (1534-1597) - the 'Apostle of Brazil' - was the author of a Tupi grammar and dictionary. The latinization and codification of native languages was one of the main activities of the Jesuits in their missions abroad. In addition, native language was used in theatrical productions and sermons - veritable sites of transposition of Luso-Iberian baroque onto the New World - so as to give conversion rhetorical power. As Severino João Albuquerque writes with respect to colonial theatre and linguistics in the conversion of the Tupi, "from the beginning Anchieta understood that if he was to succeed in his didactic effort to convert the Indians and propagate the faith, the natives' language had to be used" (Albuquerque 1996, 105). Antonio Ruiz de Montoya's dictionary thus adheres to the Jesuit paradigm of conversion through translation. For an extensive treatment of colonization, linguistic codification and conversion in the Brazilian context, see vol. 3 of *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature: Brazilian Literature*, edited by Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker (1996). For a general discussion of colonial literature, see the first volume of *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature: Discovery to Modernism*, by the same editors (1996). Anchieta will feature prominently in my formulation of the 'baroque hypothesis' as the principled production of indiscernibility through the 'inconstancy' between word and image (see Chapter 7, 7.2.3).

memory. The tension between past, present and future, between possibility, the now, and memory, is addressed by Silviano Santiago (2001, 79-110) via his distinction between ‘beginning’ and ‘origin’ and their complex interweaving. The tension between both was already at work at the very outset of the Brazilian avant-garde. For Santiago, beginning refers to a moment of decoding, an irruption, the coming onto the scene of the ‘monstrous,’ the unintelligible. It is of the order of the event as an interruptive happening. The notion of beginning embraces the myth of an autotelic, autonomous becoming and of a resistance to identification – it is fundamentally utopian and future-oriented. Seen from a post-colonial perspective, it is the beginning that puts the familiar Eurocentric scheme of source and influence, of model and copy, under erasure. Against this form of decoding stands the notion of origin, which is a process of inscription and territorialization into the body politic, a moment of identification and filiation. It entails the insertion in the “patriarchal Christian family,” and the realization that knowledge “is already completely codified by tradition and offered to man for free” as Santiago phrases it (2001, 85). The time of origin is monotheistic time: it is the temporality of one God, one body politic, one origin, and one history. Referentiality and the notion of the sign thus already come with a meaning.²⁹⁶ The sign, semiotics, is not the transcription – the re-presentation – of the *modus operandi* of semiosis into an objective system, a tabulation of *modus significandi*, it is already an interpretation, the effect of a movement of reduction (cf. above). The theory of the sign is also a theology – an ontotheology dividing the world in signifieds/signifiers, things, and words. Furthermore, as Jacques Derrida (1998, 25) writes, “the sign and the name of the divinity have the same time and same place of birth.” The ‘oversight’ that would be named *America* is rectified through its inscription within the calendar – space and time are realigned onto one single map and semiotic grid; heterogeneity is covered over through a relinking of the new territories within a

²⁹⁶ I will formulate a more thorough theoretical formulation further on in this section. Suffice it to point out for now that origin, in the sense of Walter Benjamin’s usage of the word *Ursprung*, refers to a jump forward *towards* a new point. *Ursprung* is a leap, not a turning back to a pristine beginning, which is precisely what Torres-García forces it to be, making him blind to the actuality of *mestizaje* (cf. Chapter 3, 3.2).

salvational history.²⁹⁷ The imposition of the notion of origin fosters a colonial self-understanding that views itself in terms of a copy of the European original; colonialism is thus also a matter of theories of signification. In Santiago's reading, origin invokes the process of inscription of the colony within the conceptual frame of the colonizer, informed as the latter is by notions of a progressive salvational history, patriarchy, and instrumental reason. In addition, the hegemonic imposition of the notion of origin fosters a colonial self-understanding that views itself in terms of a copy of the European original. It can also suggest why antropofagia was so invested in the notion of nationalism, and its emulation of the Eurocentric concept of the nation state: it seems to be an effect of the violent inscription within the European scriptural economy and its valuation of origins. At the same time however, origin is always susceptible to the dynamic of 'beginning,' as the moment of self-affirmation, of a polemic resistance which refuses the clarity of the sign and the subsumption within monological narratives. The beginning is the space where difference insinuates itself within the parameters of the hegemonic story, making it mutate, transform, self-different.



Figure 5.7 Group photograph, Minas Gerais, 1924. [Bonet 2009, 239].

²⁹⁷ See Chapter 1 for a succinct overview of the cartographic subsumption of the world into a totalizing world picture, and Torres-García's *Inverted Map* as an act of resistance that draws out a counter-space where cartography and cosmology overlap to the point of indeterminacy.

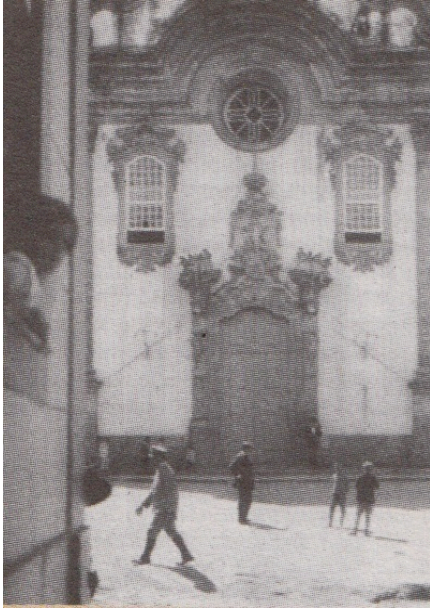


Figure 5.8 Photograph, Oswald in front of the Church of Carmo, São João del Rei, 1924. [Bonet 2009, 240].

5.2.2 The Avant-Garde ‘Discovers’ the Barroco Mineiro: Counter-Conquest and the Shock of Tradition

To fully appreciate the tension between tradition and futurity, between identification and dis-identification with the colonial legacy, between beginning and origin, we need only think back to the trip to Minas Gerais of 1924 (Figure 5.7 and 5.8), a voyage that has become as iconic as Tarsila’s *Abaporu*. Four years before the birth of antropofagia, the first generation of São Paulo modernists – accompanied by the Swiss poet Blaise Cendrars – set out to the Brazilian interior, to the historic centres of the colonial baroque in the state of Minas Gerais. Minas was Brazil’s principal mining region during the colonial period, a source of silver, gold, and diamonds. As well as the greatest site of the precious metals industry, transferring most of its riches back to the Portuguese mainland, it was also a centre of slavery, with African labourers taken from their homes to work the mines and craft jewellery.

From Brazil's early history up to 1850, slaves were brought to the country from parts of Africa where metal-working traditions were deeply entrenched in the local cultures. The people of the Fanti-Ashanti, Baule, and Yoruba groups brought with them detailed knowledge of the making of jewelry and other body ornaments. This skill would be especially important to those who were brought to Minas Gerais, Brazil's greatest mining region. Gold from Minas Gerais was fashioned into objects that employed decorative patterns and casting techniques similar to those of West Africa (Sullivan 2001, 272).

Incidentally, Aleijadinho (Antônio Francisco Lisboa; c1730-1814), the greatest Brazilian architect and sculptor of the colonial period, was Afro-Brazilian, the son of a Portuguese architect and an African slave. He completed his most impressive projects - such as the Pilgrim Church of Bom Jesus de Matosinhos in Congonhas do Campo with its soapstone saints (Figure 5.9 and 5.10) and the Church of São Francisco de Assis in Ouro Preto (Figure 5.11) - in the province of Minas Gerais, where he grew up. He was born in Vila Rica (Rich Town), later renamed as Ouro Preto (Black Gold), the epicentre of the eighteenth century gold rush in Brazil. His nickname, 'o Aleijadinho', 'the Little Cripple,' is the *nom de guerre* history has canonized him by, making the name and his leprosy – the 'monstrousness' of his figure – into a sign of counter-colonial defiance. As myth has it, deformed by his disease, Aleijadinho created his greatest masterpieces as acts of resistance to colonialism. This, at least, is how José Lezama Lima describes Aleijadinho's almost clandestine, heroic, nightly creative activity, wandering the sites of Minas, working the stone with chisels and hammer tied to his fingerless hands.

With this great leprosy, which is also the proliferating root of his art, he curls and multiplies, stirs and augments the Hispanic with the African. In the night, in the dusk of the thick and somber foliage, he arrives on his mule, enlivening with new sparks the Hispanic stone and the American silver, like the spirit of evil, working with angelic guidance, blessed by divine grace. Those are the sparks of rebellion that emerge from the great creative leprosy of our Baroque: a rebellion already nourished and purified by the gusts of the true American forest (Lezama Lima 2010, 240).

What the "men of the future" on their trip to discover the half-forgotten tradition of Barroco Mineiro did not do was destroy books and museums, as Filippo Tommaso

Marinetti had advocated in “The Futurist Manifesto.”²⁹⁸ To the contrary, like the first scene with *Abaporu*, this scene is one of epiphany, of sudden insight, eliciting a fundamental change in habits of thought. It is here that the Brazilian artistic avant-garde is really said to begin, not by a distancing from the past, but by its ingestion. The importance the *modernistas* accorded to the voyage of ‘rediscovery’ of the Barroco Minera in cities such as Ouro Preto, Diamantina, Tiradentes, and Mariana underscores the “chiasmic intermingling of the Baroque spirit and Modernism in Brazil” (Underwood 2001, 531). Moreover, it was precisely the “first modernists [who] activated the ‘discourse of tradition’” (Santiago 2001, 103). Brito Broca calls attention to the “paradoxical attitude of the travellers,” these tourists in their own country:

They are all modernists, men of the future. And to an avant-garde poet who visits us [i.e., Blaise Cendrars], scandalizing the conformist spirit, what are they going to show? The old cities of Minas, with their eighteenth century churches, where everything invokes the past and, in the last analysis, everything suggests ruins. The divorce from Brazilian reality in which most of our writers have lived made the landscape of Baroque Minas appear in the eyes of the modernists as something new and original, within, therefore, the frame of novelty and originality that they were seeking (qtd. Santiago 2001, 103).

What happened seems counter-intuitive in the light of accounts of the historical avant-garde. Instead of a distancing from the past, these proto-anthropophagites devour the colonial tradition with all their senses. They cannot get enough of the ‘shock of the old’ – the forms, lines, materiality and pictorial language of eighteenth century churches, baroque ruins, the exuberance of what they consider to be violent, brutal, unmixed ‘primitive’ colours, the atmosphere and spectacle of a frozen past. They distil a poetics from a colonial tradition of art and architecture and ‘style’ it through a futurist frame.

²⁹⁸ Article 10 of the Manifesto states: “10. We wish to destroy museums, libraries, academies of any sort, and fight against moralism, feminism, and every kind of materialistic, self-serving cowardice” (Marinetti 2006 [1909], 14).



Figure 5.9 Aleijadinho (Antonio Francisco Lisboa), Sanctuary of Bom Jesus de Matosinhos, ca. 1800. Congonhas do Campo, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

[http://whc.unesco.org/include/tool_image.cfm?src=/uploads/sites/gallery/original/site_0334_0001.jpg&id_site=334]



Figure 5.10 Aleijadinho (Antonio Francisco Lisboa), Sculpture of Daniel, Soapstone. Terrace of the Prophets, Sanctuary of Bom Jesús de Matosinhos, ca. 1800. Congonhas do Campo, Minas Gerais, Brazil. [http://farm5.staticflickr.com/4003/4261957929_21eda4d2a3_z.jpg].



Figure 5.11 Aleijadinho (Antonio Francisco Lisboa), Church of São Francisco de Assis, 1766-94. Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brazil. [http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-BHwLF4fBG14/T9bZtCbSAaI/AAAAAAAAA-8/_ZR3zvEc0NY/s1600/Aleijadinho+Antonio+St+Francis+Ouro+Preto.jpg].

Contrary to Joaquín Torres-García's fantasy of a restitution of a pristine pre-Columbian tradition untouched by the colonial, the ingestion of the Brazilian modernists is clearly not concerned with a restoration of a mythic past. The blank, new canvas of *antropofagia* is already over-saturated with history, with the present, with everyday life in colonial towns. Furthermore, the Brazilian avant-garde is invested in the preservation of this image of a past threatened by immanent industrialization. Through the rhetoric of 'Brazilianness,' modernism becomes strangely compatible with memorialization, with the ideas of patrimony and conservation,²⁹⁹ as

modernity coincided with the desire to explore and define what it is to be Brazilian. The modernists used two opposed sources: international, especially French, information and a nativism which is apparent in the inspiration from and search for Brazilian roots. It was also in the 1920s that research began into Brazilian folklore (Canclini 1996, 31)

For Tarsila, the trip to Minas meant a rediscovery of loud, 'provincial,' 'backward' colours: the *caipira* palette. These 'anti-erudite' colours of an untarnished truth, evinced, in the ironic tone of Mário de Andrade, Tarsila's "wealthy provincial 'bad taste'" (qtd. in Fabris 2000, 535), as a crafty reminder of the internal division in Brazil between a cosmopolitan, coastal avant-garde and a rural, colonial backland serving as inspiration for an artistic elite, mining the country to revitalize an aesthetic dynamic.ICLEIA Cattani points out that the unmixed colours, inspired by Tarsila's newly-acquired "rural sense of colouring" (Campos 2001, 377) which the painter took back as her main lesson from the 'baroque trip,' were 'peripheral' in the context of the avant-garde centre of Paris where

²⁹⁹ Silviano Santiago signals the institutionalization of modernism through its conservationist strand at the time of the Estado Novo, the regime lead by Getúlio Vargas from 1937 to 1945. There is a correspondence between modernism's commitment to the preservation of the colonial heritage and Estado Novo's celebration of 'national character' in its modernization project of Brazil. It shows how aspects of modernism could be co-opted in more ideologically determinate forms. In addition, the concern with the past, once disentangled from the radical, polemical and futurist-revolutionary inflection of *antropofagia*, ensured that Brazilian modernism would be rapidly institutionalized, in marked contrast to constructive universalism, which never received institutional validation during Torres-García's lifetime (cf. Ramírez 1991). Mário de Andrade spearheaded the efforts for institutional recognition through a preservationism inspired by modernism. He led the campaign to found the SPHAN, the Institute for the Historical Preservation and Artistic Patrimony of Brazil. The SPHAN - under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Health - was eventually founded in 1936, with Mário de Andrade a member of the board (cf. Santiago 2001, 104).

Tarsila had been studying under her Cubist teachers Fernand Léger, Albert Gleizes and André Lhote.

In 1924, Tarsila made two trips to ‘rediscover’ Brazil: the first to Carnival in Rio de Janeiro; the second to Semana Santa, or Holy Week, in Minas Gerais. These trips gave birth to a singular style, one marked not only by Léger’s law of generalized contrasts - softness juxtaposed with rigidity, flatness with volume, etc. - but also by a palette that was unique and unusual for European Modernism and inspired by Brazilian popular culture. Tarsila’s colour choices - such as pinks, ceruleans, sulphurous greens - were ones that, according to her, she had learned were in ‘poor taste’ (Cattani 2001, 383).

Although she still heeded the compositional laws of Léger, her bright pinks, greens and blues contradicted the prevalent ‘return to order.’ Tarsila was adamant: colour was a matter of urgency, indelibly linked to ‘Brazilianness.’ Contrary to ‘Parisian,’ diluted, historical avant-garde greens, “our green is savage. The Brazilian who is really Brazilian likes contrasting colours. I declare, as a good *caipira*, that I find beauty in certain combinations I was taught to feel were in bad taste, and that today I’m proud to augment the use of my favourite colours - blue and pink - in my pictures” (qtd. in Bonet 2009, 244). Colours are the sites of de-repression, of unlearning the lessons of European cubism, of pitting the discourse of primitivism against the neo-classical *retour à l'ordre*. The *caipira* palette is a means to reconnect with both the ‘essence’ of Brazil as well as the tempestuousness of the initial avant-garde, perhaps already a site of a new nostalgia, of the heady days of revolutionary aesthetics before the quieting after the Great War. Against the rather restricted palette and formal language of her Paris teachers, Tarsila mobilizes the garishness of kitsch, the ‘loudness’ of the baroque colour palette, as a tactic to tropicalize the Cubist school in both her ‘Pau-Brasil period’ (1924-27) and ‘Anthropophagite period’ (1928-29) (cf. Cattani 2001). Although usually associated with a return to more classical, realist, figurative modes of representation in visual art after the radical avant-garde experiments prior to the First World War, *retour à l'ordre* equally applies to a neo-classical ‘restoration’ and formalization of abstraction, a revisionist

‘correction’ of the ‘excesses’ of the avant-garde.³⁰⁰ This return to order in the twenties was characteristic of the work of Tarsila’s French teachers, i.e. Lhote, Gleizes and Léger, under whose ‘disciplining’ she completed, as she termed it, her “military service in Cubism” (Cattani 2001, 382). As Annateresa Fabris notes, this systematization of painting evinced “a process of normalization. Already in 1917 Lhote had manifested a desire to ‘reintegrate into the classical tradition that which, in the efforts of the latest generation of painters, is compatible with the eternal truth of painting,’” while in 1912, “her second teacher, Gleizes, had proposed a return to the ‘laws of painting’ after a ‘period of confusion’ marked by the flight from tradition” (Fabris 2000, 535). Even Fernand Léger, though developing a “less dogmatic law of generalized contrasts, which Tarsila applied in her Pau-Brasil series of paintings,” underwent a “period of rigorous systemization that was contrary to the avant-garde’s freedom of expression” (Cattani 2001, 382). After the trip to the baroque hinterland, this neoclassical restraint must have appeared closely aligned to the spirit of the colonial academic tradition the *modernistas* railed against. The baroque image of Brazil counteracted the disciplining of avant-garde experimentation underway in the hegemonic centre, making possible a conception of art in Brazil as a space for the restitution of the “avant-garde’s freedom of expression” through a ‘return to the disorder’ of the Barroco Mineiro.³⁰¹

In effect, the discovery is narrated through the logic of a ‘de-education of the senses,’ of de-repression, and the revaluation of ‘bad taste’ in terms of simplicity and honesty, in terms of naturalness against the over-refined decadence of too erudite academic tastes. It is the cue for a travelling back in time to childhood and naivety, to the childhood tastes of the artist that are made to converge with the early life of Brazil as an imagined community, an imaginary in which Brazil first took a ‘Gestalt’ through the

³⁰⁰ This return to tradition is also one of Joaquín Torres-García’s main concerns, who, at a time when Gleizes and Lhote had their greatest successes, was working in the neo-classical paradigm of *Noucentisme* (cf. Part I, 1.1).

³⁰¹ This constitutes the intertwining of modernism and the baroque – with modernism as neobaroque and vice versa – that is specific to Latin America’s cultural history, as Monika Kaup (2006) argues. Antropofagia reclaims a past that Europe had hitherto repressed, the ‘insignificant,’ anti-classical – at least, that was the judgment of canonical art history at that time, although perception was starting to change – baroque, which “constituted the West’s first Modernity” (Kaup 2006, 129). For more on South America’s neobaroque modernity, see 5.1.2.

colonial baroque. In short, *caipira* is inserted into the discourse of a personal and collective primitivity, and makes the new direction in painting visible as the stripping of all artifice. These at least are the terms through which Tarsila frames the encounter with the visual repertoire of the Barroco Mineiro in “Pau-Brasil and Anthropophagite Painting” (1939), the same text that recounts the epiphany of *Abaporu*. Childhood colours, repressed after so much cubist discipline, suddenly reappear, and find a way back home to legitimacy through the ‘soil of Brazil,’ recognized in the churches and murals of modest houses, of ‘baroque spontaneity’ against neo-classical learnedness. While Tarsila remembers, she produces the baroque as a site of double remembrance, making possible the twin birth of *Abaporu* and *Pau-Brasil*, the personal and the national.³⁰²

On the occasion of Blaise Cendrars’ visit to Brazil in 1924, without premeditation, with no desire to form a school, I painted the picture they called *Pau-Brasil*. Impregnated with the theory and practice of Cubism, I only had eyes for Léger, Gleizes and Lhote, my teachers in Paris. Having recently returned from Europe, and after giving various interviews to several Brazilian newspapers about the cubist movement, I felt dazzled by the folk decorations in the homes of São João-del-Rei, Tiradentes, Congonhas do Campo, Sabara, Ouro Preto and other small towns in Minas. Full of folk poetry. Return to tradition, to simplicity. The mural decorations in the modest corridor of a hotel; the room ceilings, made of coloured and braided bamboo; the church paintings, simple and moving, made with love and devotion by anonymous artists; Aleijadinho, with his statues and the brilliant lines of his religious architecture. Everything caused us to cry out in admiration. In Minas, I found the colours I loved as a child. Later, I was taught that they were ugly and *caipira*. I followed the hum of refined taste.... But later, I took my revenge on that oppression, transferring them to my canvases: purest blue, violet pink, vivid yellow and strident green, all in various grades of strength according to how much white was mixed in. Clean painting above all, without fear of conventional canons. Freedom and sincerity, a certain stylization that adapted it to the modern age. Clean contours that gave a perfect impression of the distance separating one object from another. This led to the success I had at the Galerie Percier on the Rue de la Boetie in Paris, where I had my first exhibition in 1926 (Amaral 2009, 31).

Tarsila’s ‘dazzlement’ seems to follow a script. It takes on density; it becomes a *figura* – in the shape of *Abaporu* (figure 5.6) and *Pau-Brasil* (figure 5.2) – within the ekphrastic

³⁰² For a more general theorization of the baroque and neobaroque, see the introductory section, i.e., 5.2.1.

economy of baroque conversion, where the image becomes the rhetorical vehicle for the intertwining of beginning and origin. ‘Conversion’ itself appears as a rhetorical trope, in which the ‘event’ of conversion folds back into the baroque trope of ‘conversion.’ This effects a vertiginous doubling of ‘being’ through ‘seeming,’ where authenticity becomes a matter to be worked on by the artifice of writing. The word modulates the trauma of a liminal experience, so overpowering in its visuality that it ‘blinds’ the convert in a moment of absolute non-sense, of utter in-cohesion, of an unintelligible monstrosity: “From me emerged a monstrous picture that even I didn’t know how I had done it, nor why I had done it. It seemed somewhat monstrous to me” (qtd. in Bonet 2009, 243), as Tarsila remembers the moment before her conversion to antropofagia through the visual dazzlement of the image that would later be baptized *Abaporu*. However, since one can only write a story of conversion from the position of the converted, the locus of enunciation ensures that the moment of the inchoate is granted a meaning, a function within the plot, thereby drawing the circle to an end: the unintelligible encounter with the blinding image must become nonsensical as the index of a time before the change took place. The event is incorporated within a narrative circuit: conversion is a rhetorical operation, a “Baroque mechanism” inverting ‘before’ and ‘after.’³⁰³

The canvas and the recounting of its genesis enter into the chiasmic interplay elaborated by Silviano Santiago (cf. above): the image, as site of a possible self-affirmative beginning that negates all tradition holding the promise of a creative-destructive radical primitivism, is refocused through a discourse that embeds it within the parameters of the origin with its erudite rhetoric. *Abaporu* and *Pau-Brasil* rehearse the ultimate indiscernibility of origin and beginning, of primitivism and erudition, intimating that the one can only be read through the image of the other: the baroque envelops the ‘secret’ of the empty center – the open secret that primitive and classical are merely

³⁰³ For more on the genre of the conversion with regard to the “Baroque appetite for novelty and change” (Lambert 2008, 26), see Gregg Lambert’s “The Baroque Mechanism: José Antonio Maravall,” the second chapter of his *On the (New) Baroque* (2008, 17-30). In the Introduction (5.1.2), I provide an account of the notion of the ‘return’ of the baroque as a new “fold” – through “refolding,” through a recombination and ‘recalibration’ of the relation of the visible and the legible – resulting from its “operative function” (cf. Deleuze 1994). A conversion – the name for a new distribution of the visible with regards to the legible, of seeing things anew (as the world has suddenly become entirely different) – can be seen as the effect of this baroque operative function.

relative terms without any ontological-conceptual ‘substance’ – through imagery and rhetoric. Tarsila’s description of *Pau-Brasil* is a proleptic echo, a hypertext pointing back to the future conversion effected through *Abaporu* and the movement named in its honour.

Again, as was the case with the birth of *Abaporu*, *Pau-Brasil* is posited as progenitor of a movement, of setting the ‘mood’ for things to come, giving events the aura of inevitability through the ruse of the memoir. If it is true that, in the words of Brazilian historian and writer Evaldo Cabral de Mello “things are only predictable after they have happened” (qtd. in Schwarcz 2009, 151), then Tarsila invokes a strange temporality here, where contingency – “without premeditation” – becomes an inevitability carried over into “the picture they called *Pau-Brasil*.” Through the genre of retrospection, Tarsila’s words construct a certain necessity that is presented as the solution to the enigma posed by the image. Intentionality is transferred from the author who seems to lack authority over the visual onto the image, as if what the image demanded, what it necessitated most of all, was a codification – via the name ‘Pau-Brasil’ – and a dispersal of artistic activities under its banner, under this strange flag that does not call for a positivist *Ordem e Progresso*, but instead unearths the colonial exploitation that made possible this ‘objective’ belief in progress.

The folk aspect of vernacular colours – the ‘folk poetry’ of colonial homes with their colloquial, loud colors, their idiomatic simplicity, undiluted directness – described by Tarsila is an approximation of the “Manifesto Pau-Brasil.” It makes her painting legible through the new poetics proposed by Oswald de Andrade, as if her painting was already the adaptation of a new body of work that still had to be written. In the manifesto, Oswald advocates a poetry written in a “language without archaisms, without erudition. Natural and neological. The millionfold contribution of all errors. How we speak. How we are” (Oswald de Andrade in Bonet 2009, 20). Poetry in synch with the modern must evince a spontaneity that counters that “machine to make verses,” i.e., “the Parnassian poet” held in such high esteem at that time. This anti-academic, improvisational, populist stance is caught in a performative contradiction. The text’s erudition, its manifold references to (literary) history and witticisms display a learnedness and academic play

(its entanglement with the ‘origin’) already parodying the text’s claims to primitivity and ‘beginning.’ After all, parody is the most erudite of arts. This humorous discrepancy was first pointed out by that other master of satire, Mário de Andrade. With respect to the *Pau-Brasil* collection of poetry, Mário calls attention to the central paradox of Oswald’s writing in that it “exemplifies what it so justifiably rails against: the writing of someone steeped in erudition. For this return to popular material, to the errors of the people, is the most erudite of desires” (qtd. in Madureira 2005, 28).³⁰⁴

The most erudite of desires can only be spoken by the voice of privilege. It is the voice of nostalgia intent on overcoming a scriptural-pictorial epistemological economy, the effects of coloniality, and to construct the future according to a legibility that seeks and recognizes traces of an unmediated engagement with the world.³⁰⁵ It is a desire that must formulate itself through rhetoric, through artifice: it can only be articulated from a ‘compromised’ locus of enunciation. However, rather than an aporia, a mistake in thinking executed in ‘bad taste,’ the paradox shows the constitutive tension between origin and beginning at work in (Brazilian) modernism. Antropofagia is precisely the pleasure in paradox, the contradiction for the sake of contradiction: as Haroldo de Campos reminds us, “the cannibal was a ‘polemicist’ (from the Greek *polemos*, meaning ‘struggle, combat’), but he was also an ‘anthologist’ - he devoured only the enemies he considered courageous, taking their marrow and protein to fortify and renew his own natural energies” (Campos 2007, 160).³⁰⁶ This ‘performative contradiction’ enriches the Baroque economy of expenditure, whose errors – idiosyncrasies and accidents –

³⁰⁴ In Chapter 6 (6.3), I provide a reading of the manifesto’s parodic tactic. Parody, as “parallel canto” (Ramírez 1999, 18), is the juxtaposition of one text or image through the refraction of another, effecting a disarticulation of the discernibility between original and copy. The copy is what makes the original an ‘origin,’ and is therefore as much its cause as its effect: parody is the space of the *retombée* (cf. Sarduy 1974; see 5.1.2). Parody, in its unhinging of classical, ‘unilateral’ thought, is a function of ‘baroque Reason’ (cf. Buci-Glucksmann 1994; see 5.1.2).

³⁰⁵ This would be the voice of “reflective nostalgia” (Boym 2002), in which nostalgia is not so much concerned with the return to a more or less pristine past, but the turn towards (*Ursprung*) a neobaroque *mestizaje* of visibilities and legibilities. For more on the distinction between ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective nostalgia,’ see Chapter 1 (1.2).

³⁰⁶ In other words, it is ‘baroque reason’ at work. For more details on Buci-Glucksmann’s notion of ‘baroque reason’ as the contestation of classical, instrumental reason, see the Introduction (5.1.2).

intermingle with logical truths and universals.³⁰⁷ Oswald's erudite primitivism is but one in a "millionfold contribution of all errors," one mistake in that polemical anthology constituting the plane of intricate visual-verbal re-routings that constantly shift the positions in the antagonism between the primitive and the erudite. On a logical level, Oswald may have committed an error, but it is this error that forms a "contribution" in the constitution of the sensory field of *poiesis*.

Mário's irony is more effective when addressing Tarsila and Oswald's route back to Paris, and their re-insertion into the 'historical' avant-garde. Mário in fact questions the export logic of Pau-Brasil, intimating how 'Brazilianness' is consumed in the centre thanks to the matrix of primitivism, vitiating the critical force of the intervention and making *caipira* a curiosity amongst other exoticisms on the cultural market place. In a letter written in 1924 to Tarsila, after the baroque trips and the return of 'Tarsiwald' to Paris, where the Pau-Brasil paintings would prove a great success, Mário exhorts Tarsila to further unlearn the lessons of the new French Cubist academy.

I challenge you all, Tarsila, Osvaldo, Sergio [Millet], to a formidable debate. You went to Paris as bourgeois. Ready to *épaté*. And you became futurists! Ha! Ha! Ha! I weep with envy. It is true, though, that I think of you all as *caipiras* in Paris. Your Parisianness is skin-deep. That's horrible! Tarsila, Tarsila, return back into yourself. Abandon Gris and Lhote, impresarios of decrepit criticism and decadent aesthesias! Abandon Paris! Tarsila! Tarsila! Come to the virgin forest, where there is no black art, where there are no gentle streams either. There is VIRGIN FOREST. I have created virginforestism. I am a virgin-forester. That is what the world, art, Brazil and my dearest Tarsila need (Mário de Andrade in Bonet 2009, 23).

³⁰⁷ Baroque reason is the reason of the ruin, the fragment: it sets up a 'general hermeneutic economy' where waste and detritus – a-semiosis – are integral to the dynamic of visibilities and legibilities that keep coming in and out of discernibility. Severo Sarduy is the first to delight in this subversion of instrumental reason, noting that "this obsessive repetition of a useless thing (given that it does not have access to the ideal entity of the artwork) is what determines the Baroque as *play*, in contrast to the determination of the classical work as a labor. The inevitable exclamation to which a chapel by Churriguera or Aleijadinho, a verse by Góngora or Lezama, or any other Baroque act gives rise, whether it belongs to the art of painting or pastry making, is 'So much work!' an exclamation that implies the barely concealed adjective, so much *wasted* work! So much play and squandering, so much effort without purpose! It is *homo faber*'s superego, the being-for-work which is here being enunciated impugning the dalliance, the voluptuousness of the gold, the pageantry, the immoderation, the pleasure" (Sarduy 2010, 288; emphasis in original). For a brief explanation of Derrida's notion of a 'general hermeneutic economy of the sign,' where the event of non-sense is thought in its rigorous resistance to signification, see Chapter 2 (2.1).

The discovery of the baroque in Minas Gerais led to a return to the futurist fold in Europe. To remain faithful to their discovery, Mário proposes a new beginning, a new *ism*, a futurism attuned to the forests of Brazil: virginforestism. In a delightful way, Mário pushes the logic of the new to its extreme, exploring the full parodic potential of the tension between beginning and origin. To arise from the forest, to become a ‘virgin-forester,’ a new idiom must be constructed adequate to the expression of this new tropical primitivism, this new arbitrary decision to originate anew. To speak the truth of the absolute beginning, of having created the virgin-forest ‘vacuum out of which one is to be born’ (cf. below), one must speak through the artifice of virginforestism, one must again adopt the erudition of origin, and accept the (unwanted) tradition “offered to man for free” (Santiago).

Artifice is encoded in Tarsila’s stories of painterly origins, and evinces the same ambiguity between the primitive and the erudite, the same ‘error,’ viz. a performative contradiction. Tarsila’s narratives have a certain structure, making the beginning a matter of origin. That is to say, they endow her enunciations with iterability, a scenario-like predictability. Contrary to the primitivist fantasy of a *tabula rasa*, of the absolute unlearning of all culture and language, Tarsila’s origin myths present themselves as a rhetorical model for the articulation of visual epiphanies and conversions. It is as if she were writing a template that could be painted over again and again: Tarsila constructs a decorative-rhetorical blueprint that needs to be filled in with verbal flourishes, a baroque word game exploring infinite combination but always under the aegis of visual epiphany – a profanation of religious poetry, with the painting functioning as the miraculous apparition.

The ‘new’ is a figure of speech, coinciding with the figure in the painting. The canvas is the screen for memories; it is an element in an overall *ars memoria*. Familiar and unfamiliar objects are gathered, in the museum of the memoir, resuscitated through association, and juxtaposed into the common space of the text where the story unfolds. The voyage to Minas is equally embedded in this *ars memoria*: “mural decorations, the modest corridor of a hotel, room ceilings, made of coloured and braided bamboo, church paintings, colours, statues” (Tarsila 2009, 31), constitute an inventory of remembrance, a

collection of artefact-words operating as memory aids. Avant-garde has nothing to do with progress – it is nostalgia for the new by reassembling the old.

5.2.3 Painterly Superpositions and Baroque ‘Plagiarisms’: The Anthropophagic ‘Memory Palace’

In the course of “Pau-Brasil and Anthropophagite Painting” (1939), Tarsila adds another painting to the accumulative routing of memory, and ultimately grounds the renewal of the avant-garde in the search of lost time and the trope of childhood innocence, combined with the unconscious dream image, inflecting her narrative with surrealist rhetoric.

As Tarsila continues,

Now, a pause: some years later, Sofia Caversassi Villalva, who had an artist's temperament and radiated beauty and sensitivity, said that my Anthropophagite canvases resembled her dreams. Only then did I understand that I myself had given expression to subconscious images suggested by stories I had heard as a child: the haunted house, the voice that shouted from on high: ‘I'm falling’ and let fall a foot, (which seemed enormous to me). ‘I'm falling,’ and another foot fell and then a hand, another hand and the whole body, terrifying the children. The Anthropophagite movement had its pre-Anthropophagite phase before Pau-Brasil painting, in 1923, when I painted in Paris a very controversial picture, *A Negra*, a seated figure with two robust tree trunk legs crossed, a heavy breast hanging over her arm, huge, pendulous lips, a proportionally small head. *A Negra* announced the birth of Anthropophagism. As I was saying, *Abaporu* made a great impression. It suggested a doomed creature tied to the earth by its enormous, heavy feet. A symbol. A movement should be formed around it. It was Brazil concentrated, the ‘green hell’ (Amaral 2009 [1939], 32).

“Now, a pause”: the ‘now,’ indicative of a new moment of retrospection, a re-insertion of the past into a moment of unfolding into the present, produces new memory images, new visual analogues. Tarsila’s account amends itself, adding new refinements, adducing a new antecedent, *A Negra* (Figure 5.12), bringing in the Afro-Brazilian into *Abaporu*, as its ‘underlay.’ In its irrepressible billowing through the tracing of analogies and memories, the narrative assumes a diagrammatic aspect in that it is an attempt to think through the enigma of the visual itself. Tarsila’s words are the registration of an anxiety

to get the story of genesis correct, and to ensure that this genesis be located in the 'soil' of Brazil. The movement back in time effects a chain of modifications that adds nuance: as the story digs deeper, it heaps layer upon layer of possible precedents, an archaeology that adds more soil as it digs into its site of origin: the deeper one digs, the more one fills the hole. However, the movement backwards halts at the image of a dream suggested by childhood stories, stories that were subsequently unlearned through a history of erudition. In the end, *Abaporu*'s ultimate precedent, the image that arrests the centrifugal movement of association, is the Baroque trip, in its capacity of loosening the discipline imposed upon memory. *A Negra*, a painting made prior to the voyage to Minas Gerais, already prefigured the force of desublimation of Barroco Mineiro that was already announced in *Pau Brasil*, and would find its *telos*, its retrospective catalyst, in *Abaporu*. The 'beginning' is given a specific 'origin,' a final resting place, so to speak: the trip to Minas Gerais becomes the mythical *arkhé*, the omphalos binding antropofagia and the modernist project as a whole. The cannibal is territorialized by the soil, the 'land of Brazil,' given a home, anchored by the word, bespeaking the knowledge of the unschooled child.



Figure 5.12 Tarsila do Amaral, *A Negra*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm. Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo. [Bonet 2009, 111]

However, this concern with producing a canonical account of the emergence of modernism – of fixing it in its ‘proper place’ – runs counter to antropofagia’s ecstasy of plagiarism. In fact, this paradox counts as merely another ‘performative contradiction,’ another ‘error’ enriching the repertoire of contradictions that is antropofagia. Mário de Andrade’s anthropophagous novel *Macunaíma* is a case in point, and sheds light on the self-affirmative power of plagiarism as the contradictory intertwining of ‘origin’ and ‘beginning,’ showing how the ‘origin’ can be reframed and parodied in the guise of absolute ‘beginning.’ *Macunaíma*’s subtitle, “The hero with No Character,” epitomizes the anthropophagic principle of ‘inconstancy,’ of allowing oneself to be moulded by

outside influences, of forever being in the making through the ingestion of foreign influences. This foreignness is quite literal, since the novel is a patchwork of ethnographic accounts restructured and remoulded into a ‘tropical’ surrealist anti-novel. *Macunaíma* delights in the construction of the artifice of the primitive. Central is reiteration, the parroting of ethnographic discourse through a figure of nothing, the primitive artefact, the mindless echo without memory, not dragged down and immobilized by the ‘anxiety of influence,’³⁰⁸ of which Borges’s character Funes the Memorious is the personification.³⁰⁹ Instead, *Macunaíma* is the principle of dispersion, not hindered by memory or tradition, but repeating words already written long before him. *Macunaíma* is the story of a beginning composed from the scraps of a tradition of origin, of a glottographic de-voicing of the Amazonian body through inscriptions. *Macunaíma* the character knows nothing of this; *Macunaíma* the text is its reiteration, almost word for word.

Accused of plagiarism, Mário revels in the thought and retorts that he has not ‘restricted’ himself to copying the work of Theodor Koch-Grünberg’s 1917 ethnographic study *Von Roraima zum Orinoco* (From Roraima to Orinoco) where he found the mythical character of Macunaíma as it were ‘ready-made.’ His copying extends much further than what the limited imagination of his detractors is able to conjure up: even in their allegations they are lacking in creativity. Or, as the novelist himself writes with his characteristic ironic wit,

What amazes me and what I regard as sublime goodwill on the part of my detractors is that they forget everything they know, restricting my plagiarism to Koch-Grünberg, when I copied everyone. I confess that I copied, sometimes verbatim. Not only did I copy the ethnographers and Amerindian texts, but I included entire sentences from Portuguese colonial chroniclers. Finally I copied Brazil, at least insofar as I was interested in satirizing Brazil through Brazil itself. But not even the idea of satire is my own. The only original thing left to me then is the accidental Pedro Alvares Cabral, who, having by probable chance discovered Brazil for the

³⁰⁸ Cf. Bloom (1973). For a highly critical assessment of the afterlife of Bloom’s concept of the ‘anxiety of influence,’ see Asha Varadharajan’s “The Unsettling Legacy of Harold Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence*” (2008).

³⁰⁹ Cf. “Funes the Memorious,” in Borges (1964, 87-85).

probable first time, ended up claiming Brazil for Portugal. My name is on the cover of *Macunaíma* and nobody can take that away from me (qtd. in Madureira 2005, 86-87).

Mário affirms this ‘ecstasy of plagiarism,’ as the *modus operandi* of antropofagia, as a joyous counterpart to the anxiety of influence, an ecstasy that is also found in the colonial baroque; it is ‘baroque reason’ at *play* (cf. Sarduy and Buci-Glucksmann; see 5.1.2). This ecstasy of plagiarism is manifest in the sardonic pleasure Mário takes in naming all his sources, in confession all his copying, perhaps even confessing to things he did not use. As he further admits, it becomes clear that “not only did he take from the German ethnographer but also from Brazilian ethnographers and historians, from different Amerindian narratives, from Portuguese colonial chronicles and so on” (Rosenberg 2006, 44). *And so on*: the etcetera of the baroque. Tarsila’s apparently anxious attempt can also be read under the sign of the joy of plagiarism, in which the images constructed through her *ars memoria* are the ‘scraps’ superimposing themselves onto the autarchy of *Abaporu*, intimating that the canvas is itself a collage of many other images and traditions, the product of a patchwork aesthetic that is simulated ekphrastically through the text’s hopscotching through a miscellany of memory-places as a way to approximate visual dispersal. However, this not to say that anxiety is not at work, but it is a modulated anxiety, made merry through visual association. In the end, the image is still anchored to the ‘land of Brazil.’ What it shows must, in the final analysis, be compatible with the nationalist avatars of Brazilian modernism – the dispersal is conceptually circumscribed. However, the image, when unmoored from this historically-specific conceptual infrastructure, will flow out of the bounds of the import-export logic characteristic of the discourse of Brazilian modernism at that time.

Actually, the movements of memory encoded in Tarsila’s memoir evoke the dynamism, the transformative power of *Ursprung*, of *origin* understood in Walter Benjamin’s use of the term. In the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1977), Benjamin differentiates the historical-materialist conception of *Ursprung* from the idealist notion of *Entstehung*:

Origin [*Ursprung*], although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [*Entstehung*]. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the

existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual; its rhythm is apparent only to a dual insight. On the one hand it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete (Benjamin 1977, 45).

The notion of *Ursprung* thematizes Silviano Santiago's chiasmic play between 'origin' and 'beginning,' in that gives the past a future-oriented and contingent accent, thus allowing an exploration of the deep affinity between the Brazilian avant-garde and the baroque. Haroldo de Campos reads the emergence of the New World baroque through Benjamin's conception as it contrasts with the traditional – 'originary' in Santiago's vocabulary³¹⁰ – image of a static origin.

More productive than 'origin,' with its genetic-evolutionary imprint, is the operational concept of *Ursprung* elaborated by Walter Benjamin. *Entstehung* (genesis), viewed as a point of origin, culminates in the *Parousia* (presence) of a conclusive identity. *Ursprung* derives from the etymological notion of a 'jump' and is associated with *Verwandlung* (transformation). It is the vertigo of this process that produces 'difference.' The eruption of Brazilian baroque within the context of the ecumenical art of the seventeenth centuries can be aptly described as a jump and was nothing short of vertiginous (Campos 2001, 373).

Abaporu, and antropofagia in general, is the re-registration of the vertigo – the 'dazzlement' – when face to face with Barroco Mineiro: it is neo-baroque. Tarsila's memoir is the ekphrasis of this encounter. In its visual-textual skipping, the memoir – as an exercise in the art of memory – recreates the never-ending transformations, foldings and unfoldings it makes visible in *Abaporu*, thus giving rise to a composite baroque imagetext. The restless movement of remembering and association constitutes a baroque play of metamorphoses without hidden 'kernel,' zero point or ontotheological 'deep grammar' that holds the imagetext together, although the master signifier 'Brazil' is

³¹⁰ A Babylonian, baroque confusion of tongues ensues. With 'beginning,' Santiago thematizes the contingency and unfinizable nature of Benjamin's *Ursprung*, while he reads 'origin' as closely resembling 'genesis,' although at the same time it resounds with *Ursprung*'s second aspect, i.e., as a "process of restoration and reestablishment" (Benjamin 1977, 45).

never far from the horizon, always ready to haunt the play of association and ‘fix’ it in place whenever the anarchic dispersal threatens to overstep the territorial boundary. However, the ‘soil of Brazil’ never has the last word: it is always put in relation to a cosmopolitanism that immediately runs counter to any harsh judgement in the boundary dispute. With this in mind, it must be emphasized that antropofagia, in its alignment with the baroque, as a movement of inconstancy, never settles on a distinct point of origin (0,0) – especially not ‘Brazil,’ as Brazil only becomes more discernible against its Parisian ‘ground.’ Furthermore, the map of remembrance lacks an *axis mundi*. Like *Ursprung*, memory is mutational, it leaps, reconfigures, transforms. The origin is figured as a movement of infinite regress, with Tarsila’s paintings constituting a baroque superposition rather than a clear image of self-identical genesis. Instead, we have the kaleidoscope of moving images, their movement itself laying claim to being the site of origin. The origin is a sequence of images, a play of light: like the play of light forming and transforming the contours of Aleijadinho’s architecture and soapstone statues, morphing in and out of identity, thereby sustaining the actuality of non-identity.³¹¹

Tarsila’s memoirs show *Ursprung* at work, its kaleidoscopic, baroque ‘jumps’ of associations. Memory, as verbal-visual rhetorical device, is not a grid, a system of *grafismo*, a reservoir of meanings at the ready. Memories and the meanings attached to them are produced; they are shaped through the act of remembering, as the jumps in Tarsila’s discourse make evident. The leaps from *Abaporu*, the baroque trip to Minas, to *Pau-Brasil*, to *A Negra* and back to her childhood evince baroque superposition, with the images mixing into a pool of visual traits, running outside the bounds of the frame, travelling back and forth through time. Tarsila’s paintings, as transposed in her flexible memorial text, is a ‘memory box,’ a collection of items and places very much like the “memory palace of the Roman orators” in which

ideas, recollections, persons, and feelings were draped around rooms or placed on furnishings and then were verbally ‘picked up’ by rhetors, such as Cicero and Quintilian, in the order in

³¹¹ In Chapter 1 (1.2), I provide a gloss on Theodor Adorno’s notion of “non-identity.” Non-identity also plays a major role in Buci-Glucksmann’s conception of ‘baroque reason,’ which I address in 5.1.2.

which they were to be discussed. It was thus possible to ally thoughts and events with specific forms and shapes in a mentalized architecture of places (Stafford 1999, 153).

Minas Gerais is such a memory place, a site of insertion taken up by antropofagia and recombined into its narrative. Framed through modernism's discourse, Minas Gerais and Brazil's colonial period as such become memory palaces where "thoughts and events" are allied with "specific forms and shapes in a mentalized architecture of places."³¹² Mnemotechnics works by means of association, by interweaving things, words and events to the point where they conjure up images and new words, the way the image of a seated monster conjured up the 'cannibal of the land,' in turn giving rise to the word 'abaporu,' constructed or found by means of a missionary's dictionary. Antropofagia, or Tupi-mnemonics – as exercised by Tarsila in her paintings and memoirs, by Oswald in his poetry, manifestoes, plays and theoretical writings and as practices by Mário – is a form of montage, where 'retrieval' is a new production, a formation, a rhetorical exercise in inserting the past into the present with an eye to the future, thereby making hybrid superimposition. Following Leibniz's baroque *mathesis universalis* as the art of juxtaposition, which, if followed through, would have led to a "transdisciplinary 'art of conjecture' (*ars conjectandi*)," anthropophagic *ars memoria* – as the production of *Ursprung* – can be understood in terms of such a combinatorics, which,

by definition, valorized intermediary relations, profoundly challenging Descartes's divorce between objective and subjective knowledge. Like plastic Lego blocs, a few kinds of elements

³¹² This architecturalization of memory shows affinities with Walter Benjamin's notion of the fragment as it pertains to the precarious construction of the allegory. For more on Benjamin's 'ruinous' allegoresis, where "allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (Benjamin 1977, 178), see Chapter 1 (1.1). Out of the fragments of the Barroco Mineiro, antropofagia constructs the allegory of 'Brazil' through a collage of images and legibilities. However, this construction does not indicate a mood of melancholia – a "religious scruple" (ibid.) – that Benjamin found characteristic of the seventeenth-century German baroque, but a polemical pathos of bathos. At least this is what the "Manifesto Antropófago" gives to read: an irreligious scrupulousness that ridicules the pomp of civilization, which is the mask of erudite colonization (see Chapter 6, 6.3). The anthropophagist does not mourn the loss of transcendence, or rue the fact that the ultimate signified has vacated earth and can only be approached after death. Here one will not find the nostalgia for the pure beginning of the pre-Columbian, as the discourse of constructive universalism clothes itself in (see Part 1). On the contrary, antropofagia lives out its life on the surface of the ontology of the surface, where transcendence is merely another crease in the fabric of the seeable and the sayable (cf. Sarduy 2010; see also 5.1.2).

were used to construct an infinite variety of different, coexisting objects whose meaning depended on how they became integrated into other activities (Stafford 1999, 125).³¹³

This situational aspect of knowledge ensures that there is no ultimate meaning, no ‘core’ signified (not even an empty one) that animates the manifestations. Subject and object, inside and outside are incessantly folded back into one another. The distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* becomes increasingly indeterminate through the accumulation of visual-verbal associations. This zone of ‘indistinction’ between nature and culture is choreographed in a final superimposition, Tarsila’s painting *Antropofagia* (Figure 5.13), an image that condenses the constellatory energy of the *modus operandi* of antropofagia, charging the canvas with proleptic associations, awaiting the ‘big bang’³¹⁴ when the eye of the viewer touches the surface of the canvas, the moment he/she starts to ‘see things.’ The image is an anthology of polemos, a field of contradictions harbouring a surplus of regimes of visibility/legibility. As Cattani points out, not only does the painting superimpose the Afro-Brazilian and the Tupi, it also overlays it with the forest, the body, man, culture and nature. The contours, the curves of the line do not delineate and cut up, but envelop figure and ground into colour fields of the indistinct.

In the mythic totemization of *Anthropophagy* - taboo transformed into totem, according to Oswald - vegetation also becomes totemic. To a certain extent vegetation becomes assimilated into the human body and is metamorphosed by it. (...) The Antropofagia movement may very well have provided the setting for Tarsila’s Ithaca: from Black Woman to Anthropophagy, from point of departure to point of arrival, arriving the same, yet changed. The figures in *Black Woman* and *Abaporu* have been adapted, seeking a union in which they might lose their own features in order to assimilate with the other and the surrounding vegetation (Cattani 2001, 384, 385).

The movement of the line traces mimicry, and not mimesis; the conflation between bodies and vegetation, between extended and thinking matter is effected by the line in

³¹³ Recombination and serialization is the *modus operandi* of the baroque. In fact, as Deleuze argues, the baroque precisely *is* the exercise of this ‘operative function’ which engages infinity (cf. 5.1.2).

³¹⁴ Cf. Sarduy 1974. See 5.1.2 for Sarduy’s understanding of the neobaroque and the baroque poetics of scientific imagery, with the ellipsis as the baroque ‘deformed’ circle and the ‘big bang’ as metaphor for neobaroque dispersal.

conjunction with the colour plane, making the world oscillate between and among the vegetative, animal and mineral kingdoms.



Figure 5.13 Tarsila do Amaral, *Antropofagia*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 126 x 142 cm. Fundação José e Paulina Nemirovsky, São Paulo. [Bonet 2009, 161].

5.2.4 The Baroque and the ‘Inconstancy’ of the Tupi Soul: The Counter-Conquest of a ‘Marble’ Culture

Antropofagia paints the refutation of the principle of non-contradiction, the ‘inconstancy’ characteristic of Tupi ontology. In *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul* (2011), Eduardo Viveiros de Castro focuses on the encounter between the Jesuit missionaries and the Tupi-tribes, and the main difficulty confronting the Catholics in their catechization of the native population. It is not so much that the Tupinambá articulate open resistance to their teachings, quite the contrary. The Jesuits find the Tupi all too willing to convert, and simultaneously all too willing to revert to their previous ‘bad habits’ moments later. They evince an uncontrollable “mimetic enthusiasm” (Castro 2011, 19), displaying an eagerness to devour the ‘true Word,’ a willingness *to be like* the other, to allow the full force of analogy to do its work. However, just when it seemed Christian belief had finally taken root, they turn their backs to their new teachings and re-ingest, to invoke José Anchieta’s phrase, the “vomit of old habits” (qtd. in Castro 2011, 10), viz. polygamy, drinking, ritual cannibalism, shamanism, warfare, debauchery. Castro takes up the central metaphoric opposition formulated by Antonio Vieira in his *Sermon of the Holy Spirit* (1657), one of the greatest Ibero-American baroque texts. To make the ‘flightiness’ of the Indians - the ‘inconstancy of their soul’ - intelligible, he employs the ‘vegetative’ metaphor of myrtle - as the paradigm of uncontrollable growth and wild overrunning if left unattended - as opposed to the European image of culture visualized through the marble statue. The latter material not only bespeaks majesty and monumentality, but also the strength of conviction, the deep rootedness of tradition that is resistant to the elements once the stone has been chiselled to perfection according to the master plan of the divine Architect. As Vieira writes,

Here, then, lies the difference between some nations and others in the doctrine of faith. Some nations are naturally hard, tenacious, and constant, and with difficulty they receive the faith and leave behind the errors of their ancestors (...); but, once they have given themselves over, once they have received the faith, they stay firm and constant in it, like statues of marble: it is no longer necessary to work with them. There are other nations, however - and such are those of Brazil that receive everything that is taught them with great docility and ease, without arguing,

without objecting, without doubting, without resisting. But they are statues of myrtle that, if the gardener lifts his hand and his scissors, will soon lose their new form, and return to the old natural brutishness, becoming a thicket as they were before (qtd. in Castro 2011, 2).

Myrtle always poses the tendency to return to the indeterminacy of the unformed, the formless. The radical inconstancy of the Indian soul entails a formlessness always receptive to new shaping, a new re-shaping through the influx of otherness that impresses itself on the amorphous mass. The ‘self’ of Tupi ontology is a form in progress, a form lacking in definite outlines, always in motion, forming and un-forming, with only moments of stability: malleability is essence. Against the hard marble of culture, Tupi culture presents the image of culture as pliable, alloplastic, allomorphic.

Furthermore, as Castro reconstructs - thereby producing - the image of cannibal ontology, the Tupi understanding of being, as principled inconstancy, is marked by indifference to the law of non-contradiction, and the laws of logic in general, as well as the very idea of law-like regularity. The Tupi mode of life is that of change, and bespeaks radical immanence, an ‘a-ontotheological’ attitude. *Yes* and *no* are not mutually exclusive; they are complementary modalities advancing the allomorphic, centrifugal force of analogy to take hold and effect change. Tupinambá philosophy, as the constitutive ‘exit from the self,’ is predicated on an immanent relation to otherness. It is a topology without totality, an architectonic without centre. It is a modular self-fashioning, always on the move, caught in cycles of forming and un-forming, an amorphous contracting and expanding of contours: *automodelization*.³¹⁵ In a sense, what Castro suggests through his ultra-baroque revision of ethnography, is that Tupi philosophy is more baroque than the philosophy and culture ‘imported’ from the Luso-Iberian centre. The latter is still too anchored to the invisible ontotheological centre holding everything together, a monocultural centre that would splinter soon enough. From this perspective, Tupi-ontology, as a-signifying semiosis of infinite combinatorics and analogizing, is the predestination of post-modernism, as the ultra-baroque regime of infinite

³¹⁵ In Chapter 4 (4.1), I use Guattari’s (1996) term of diagrammatological ‘automodelization’ – the model’s self-critical, incessant, historically contingent meta-modeling through what it receives and attempts to make legible/visible – and contrast it with the static model that insists on the universality of the distribution of its genera (the distribution of the ‘symbolic,’ the ‘real,’ the ‘imaginary’).

superimpositions that was already in place even before the baroque had taken hold of the South. Castro offers the suggestion that the baroque metaphor of the inconstant myrtle and its association with indifference to logical non-contradiction is of Aristotelian provenance. From this perspective, Tupi ontology bespeaks the vegetative absurdity Aristotle ascribes in the *Metaphysics* to the “man who ‘has no arguments of his own about anything,’ and in particular who refuses to submit to the principle of non-contradiction,” making him ““really no better than a vegetable”” (Castro 2011, 7). This strange, baroque confluence between Tupi thinking and the Old World baroque becomes even more outspoken when taking into account the rhetorical use of baroque regimes of legibility/visibility in the history of conversion and coloniality. Baroque spectacle was employed as a means of overpowering the inconstancy of the Indian soul. David K. Underwood notes that

the earliest Baroque festivals in Brazil served to ‘seduce and attract the savage natives’ who continued to practice cannibalism after being converted and whose ‘inconstant souls’ therefore demanded more and more of the festival celebration to conquer them for the Christian faith (Underwood 2001, 528).

The baroque spectacle of conversion was somehow receptive to the ‘inconstancy’ of the Indian soul. In its malleability, the inconstant Indian soul somehow represented a baroque to the second degree, resulting in a strange accumulation of baroque ‘supply’ in response to an ever-increasing Tupi ‘demand.’

What the 1924 festivals in Minas Gerais amounted to was a counter-conversion, transforming the *modernistas*, by means of the New World baroque, to the principled inconstancy of Tupi ontology. Through contact with the Barroco Mineiro, the modernists were counter-catechized into *antropofagia*. However, Tupi and baroque reason start to approximate one another to such a degree that the concept of ‘regime of visibility/legibility’ itself becomes highly ambiguous, to the point of indiscernibility.³¹⁶ The close approximation of baroque and Tupi, their mutual receptivity, threatens to make the distinction between ‘regimes’ tenuous, threatening to engulf the concepts of

³¹⁶ For my usage of the term ‘regime of legibility/visibility,’ see the general Introduction which also contains a critique of Jacques Rancière’s three regimes of art as the terms in a static model.

‘legibility’ and ‘visibility’ through baroque superposition. It seems that the similarity traced between baroque dynamism and Tupi inconstancy is due to the work of the baroque as such, in its uncanny power to force resemblances, to produce visual-verbal analogies. The analogy Tupi-baroque can be read as the effect of the baroque’s auto-superposition and becomes, as such, uncanny proof of baroque’s omnipotence in its self-perpetuation, its self-generation, its self-subversion. The analogy folds back into the image of the baroque, and the image of the Tupi alike. What is effected is a ‘performative non-contradiction,’ where the example becomes the model, where Tupi and baroque can no longer be clearly distinguished through the disintegration of clearly delineated temporalities. To use Severo Sarduy’s concept, the rapprochement between baroque and Tupi is the labour of *retombée*.

I called *retombée*, for lack of a better term in Spanish, all a-chronic causality: the cause and consequence of a given phenomenon may not be successive in time, but coexist; the ‘consequence,’ can even precede the ‘cause’; both can be shuffled, as in a game of cards. *Retombée* is also a similarity or likeness in what is discontinuous: two distant objects, without communication or interference, can reveal themselves as analogous; one can function as the double of the other—the word also taken in the theatrical sense of the term: there is no hierarchy of values between the model and the copy (Sarduy qtd. in Moraña 2005, 277).

The painting *Antropofagia* explores this malleability through the movement of the line and the juxtaposition of *caipira* colour planes, engaging in transubstantiations, transmigrations - between the material, the vegetable, and the animal. Figuration and abstraction enter into a zone of non-contradiction, a landscape where the anthropomorphic and the tropical anti-human intersect. However, this amorphousness is the effect of superposition and not the ‘substance’ of the image itself. Non-contradiction cannot be ‘illustrated,’ and *Abaporu* does not ‘exemplify’ indiscernibility on its own account. Instability is the product of visual-verbal association, of a baroque rhythm of an *ars combinatoria* without end, making the figures and non-figures in the painting extend outside of the frame. *Antropofagia* is the condensed site of an *ars memoria* informed by the anarchic dynamic of visual association, as a means to move through space and time.

Tarsila’s *Anthropophagy* (1929) reproduces the central figures of her paintings *Black Woman* (1923) and *Abaporu* (1928). Anthropophagy not only transfers these works onto the same

canvas - where both assume tremendous similarity, as if two sides of the same body - it also transfers them from 1923 to 1929 (Cattani 2001, 384).

Totemic vegetation, the becoming-body of the forest, the 'land,' the 'soil' becoming sapient, limbs and breast dissolving back into the image of *A Negra* and *Abaporu*, the 'savage green' an overlay from *Pau-Brasil* - this "tremendous similarity" already articulated in Tarsila's memoir accelerates the vertigo of the *Ursprung* and the jump of the return back to "Tarsila's Ithaca: from *Black Woman* to *Anthropophagy*, from point of departure to point of arrival, arriving the same, yet changed" (ibid.). Tarsila sets out on her own 'dialectic of enlightenment,' starting from primitivist modernity only to recall antiquity in a heady rhetorical voyage that produces new memorials every time a new resemblance, a new point of anchor, is made out. Memory hybridizes: *ars memoria*, the technics of association and recombination, awakens the demon of analogy, forcing the miscegenation of words with images - "elements mating helter-skelter with any neighbouring element" (Stafford 1999, 84). Hyper-iconicity, the infinite morphing of one image into another through the matrix of language, the unstoppable growth of myrtle always assuming new shapes, harbours "transcategorical" power (ibid., 104). Visual analogy and the writing that responds to its a-signifying potential traverses the boundaries set up by discursive cognition and overflows the limits imposed by concepts. Visual resemblance in the form of superposition is thus the insistence of the sensory, the work of aesthesis producing affective links that overrun the anchoring through words.

This is the baroque lesson of *Antropofagia* and all the other images and texts it carries within its ever-expanding constellation. It is a figure of thought, educating us - while making us un-learn a number of other lessons through its irrepressible erudition - that superposition is not the same as synthesis, and that hybridity should not be understood as a reconciliation of contraries. Writing in homage to José Lezama Lima, Severo Sarduy insists that

Cuba is not a synthesis, a syncretic culture, but a superposition. A Cuban novel must make explicit all the strata in that superposition, must show all its 'archaeological' planes - they could even be separated into tales, for example, one Spanish, another African, another Chinese - and achieve Cuban reality through the meeting of those tales, through their coexistence in the

book's *volume*, or as Lezama does with his accumulations, in the structural unity of each metaphor, each line (Sarduy 1989, 56).

Antropofagia is not a movement intent on synthesis, although I have been using the term 'hybridity' precisely in the sense Sarduy reserves for superposition. In my view, an adequate understanding of hybridity is one that takes the irreducibility of the strata of superpositions as *sine qua non*, as indeconstructible - it is the *prise de position* required to keep in touch with antropofagia's polemical anthologism. Superimposition never results in an identity, in a figure with clear ideational contours. Instead, the density of metaphoric superposition works like *sfumato*, making outlines indiscernible. "Metaphor, a way of knowing, gradually invades the story it is equal to, tying together a plot of comparisons, of forced similarities" (ibid., 55). This infinite movement of analogies, this overlaying that effects a non-discursive form of knowledge is the work of aesthesis antropofagia also partakes in. In short, it is the reprise of the *Ursprung* of the Baroque.

Ursprung is in itself a baroque term, implicated within a history of its own readings and modulations, in chains of 'errors' making up the millionfold contributions to history in its constant remembering.³¹⁷ In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Martin Heidegger employs the notion of *Ursprung* in a similar vein as Benjamin, pointing to the contingency of a new beginning, yet also highlighting its always-already having been 'in the works,' in the background of the world, waiting to leap forward at the right moment. The *Ursprung* is never a matter of an absolute break – this would be wholly unintelligible. The *Ursprung* is what opens up a new future, but does not emerge *ex nihilo*. The 'new' always arises against a certain horizon that makes it stand out; it is shaped by the contours of a culture's practices which make the 'new' recognizable as new, thus endowing it with a certain unintelligibility against a 'ground' of intelligibility. Or, as Heidegger formulates it, "The new beginning is a leap. ... What is thus cast forth is, however, never an arbitrary demand, the beginning prepares itself the longest time and wholly inconspicuously" (Heidegger 1971, 76). Against the 'ground' of the world – a set

³¹⁷ In 5.2.3 I already provided an interpretation of *Ursprung* in relation to antropofagia's reclaiming of the Barroco Mineiro. The text that follows should be considered a baroque variation on some of the claims made there.

of practices, a *habitus* bespeaking a specific understanding of being, a ‘style’ of a culture – a new ‘figure’ delineates itself, something ‘monstrous’ still awaiting its ‘proper’ name, as the as-yet unintelligible in search of recognition by a future fully adequate to it.

It is this certain ‘predisposition’ of the background in the emergence of the unexpected that Alejo Carpentier signals with the strange confluence of the ‘baroque’ already-in-place and the artistic style that would take hold of South America, in a way reprising the strange confluence of Tupi ultra-baroque and the Old World baroque transplant suggested by Viveiros de Castro. On Carpentier’s view, the New World was ‘ripe’ for the Baroque: the ‘South’ was in a sense already baroque, already in excess of itself – the forest was baroque (it was not ‘virgin’ as Mário pretended, tongue-in-cheek) – and was to be schooled (but this proved never successful) by neoclassicism. The baroque would always reappear, like myrtle. Nature appears as purposive, as purposely baroque, a ‘sinful’ *luxuria* of animal and vegetable kingdoms awaiting adequate approximation in baroque art. Or, in the words of Alejo Carpentier,

We were always baroque and we have to continue being baroque, for a very simple reason: in order to define, paint, determine a new world, unknown trees, incredible vegetation, immense rivers, one is always being baroque. And if you take the Latin American production in matters of the novel, one will find that we are all baroque. For us, the baroque style is something that comes to us from the world in which we live: from the churches, from the pre-colonial temples, from the ambience, from nature. We are baroque and by the baroque style we define ourselves (qtd. in Moraña 2005, 246).

The ‘South’ was already ‘predisposed’ to devouring the Old World Baroque; its *Ursprung* was already long in preparation, unnoticeable, preparing itself to transform – to de-form – the terms imported from the hegemonic center and devour it, inside out. In its resistant receptivity, Alejo Carpentier’s ‘New World Baroque’ is in fact already an ultra-baroque, intensifying and reconfiguring – to the point of a polemical overidentification, an antagonistic anthologization – the Old World Baroque. As Elizabeth Armstrong writes in the catalogue for the exhibition *Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art*, “the European baroque encountered indigenous forms that were also baroque. The mingling of European and American forms produced an intensified baroque, ‘a baroque to the second power’—an ultrabaroque” (Armstrong 2000, 4).

The forest was already baroque; it resisted unambiguous ‘schooling.’ The confluence, the New World’s baroquing of the baroque, ensured its long after-life outside the full grasp of the hegemonic center. Haroldo de Campos invokes Benjamin’s term of *Fortleben*, of a certain life after death, a survival, a *Nachträglichkeit* – ‘deferred action’ – in which clear temporal schemas, such as those proposed by teleological art histories, are subjected to condensation, to a baroquing of their own. “The prevalence of the Baroque might be likened to the Benjaminian notion of *Fortleben* (‘afterlife’) through which this style can be dispersed in multiple avatars, posterior to its historical moment” (Campos 2001, 373). Dispersal is indeed the animating force of the New World Baroque. Outside of its context of ‘genesis,’ the New World baroque takes on a life – an after-life, a second life, a virtual counter-life. It grows and mutates of its own accord. Like the modular rhizomes of myrtle, it overruns the majestic marble that holds together the European idea of culture as a deeply rooted, arborescent structure. Antropofagia is a graft of this baroque myrtle. Transposed onto a modern context, it extends the “chiasmic intermingling of the Baroque spirit and Modernism in Brazil” (Underwood 2001, 531). Tarsila’s paintings *Abaporu* and *Antropofagia* can be thought of as the myrtle having its way with the neo-classical, bronze majesty of Rodin’s *Thinker*. The demon of analogy makes ‘thinking’ envelop even the most inanimate contours of the mineral – ensouling the ‘soil’ of Brazil – while ensouling the surrounding vegetation and ‘vegetating’ humanity. *Antropofagia* is the choreography of contours that dramatize the inconstancy of the Indian, Afro-Brazilian, Barroco Mineiro, vegetative, animal soul, a mystery play where *res cogitans* continually transmogrifies into *res extensa*, and vice versa.

It is here that Heidegger’s thought runs against its limit: it cannot think the baroque since it envisions culture in the image of the solemn Greek temple, a dwelling place of the gods that is one with the majestic rock from which it makes the world shine forth. The baroque has no patience for such marble, monumental, neo-classical grandeur – such intolerable constancy. Baroque, anthropophagic reason poses a counter-image of culture not grounded in the metaphor of marble firmness. Quoting one of Theodor Adorno’s theses, in turn derived from a memoir by Hans Robert Jauss – a veritable feat of *ars memoria* – Haroldo de Campos thematizes the alchemical power of the baroque in its ability to elevate even the most ‘minor’ substance to the status of tradition, thereby

producing a different idea of what counts as tradition, of what is worthy of memorialization. Detritus and not grandeur holds out the promise of redemption.

There we find the actual theme of the meaning of tradition: that which is relegated to the side of the road, scorned and suppressed; that which is collected under the name of old junk: it is there, and not in the set of works which supposedly challenge time, where what is truly alive in tradition takes its refuge (qtd. in Campos 2007, 162).

Incidentally, it is this alchemical power that put Salvador Dalí's work, in all its Spanish-Catholic, Baroque ex-centricity, in such an awkward position vis-à-vis the dominant, 'neo-classical' French surrealist group headed by André Breton. Dalí's attachment to the transformational principle of Baroque reason, in which the most abject could be lifted to the heights of the divine through mystic reconfiguration, was an insight that could not be accommodated by an avant-garde that was premised on the conviction that total de-repression was attainable through the liberation of the unconscious, informing the revolutionary-progressivist fantasy of a surreal ontological realm of pure 'beginnings' without 'origins.' In *L'âne pourri*, Dalí celebrates the power of the Hispanic baroque to transubstantiate even the most base suffering into images of ecstasy and pleasure, as conduits to the divine.³¹⁸ Even if the abject "took on the appearance of a putrid ass, and although this ass were really horribly rotten, and covered by thousands of flies and ants, nothing could convince me that his cruel putrefaction was anything but the harsh, blinding glitter of new precious stones" (qtd. in Subirats 2000, 524). Although posing the danger of the aestheticization of suffering - the danger of fascism - a more generous reading could see in it the suggestion that the abject and the sacred are interlocked in a chiasmic, polemical constellation, in which the outcome of what will become tradition can never be determined in advance. Moreover, Dalí's rhetoric, in giving prominence to the transmutation of the monstrous into the divine, the contingent becoming-sacred of the most profaned, brings us back to José Lezama Lima's reading of the Barroco Mineiro as surreptitious counter-conquest, and the nocturnal rebellious art of Aleijadinho. Touched

³¹⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the links between *antropofagia*, the Hispanic baroque and Dalí's baroque surrealism, see Eduardo Subirats's insightful "From Surrealism to Cannibalism," in Schwartz (2000, 523-527). For an extensive account of South American, as well as Portuguese and Quebecois avant-gardes in terms of a 'peripheral surrealism,' see the essay collection *Portugal, Québec, Amérique Latine: un surréalisme périphérique?* edited by Luis de Moura Sobral (1984).

by God, the Afro-Brazilian's leprosy, the de-formation of the Gestalt of his body, is the indication of a spiritual superiority whose truth will only unfold through the progressive liberation of the South from the colonial center. Aleijadinho's baroquely deformed body, transposed onto the sinuous, serpentine lines of his facades and sculptures, compressing an Afro-Brazilian counter-hegemonic force, already prefiguring the rebellions ahead. In a sense, his work is the proleptic commemoration of a future to come, a future independence, the traces of revolutions set in stone before the actual political struggles had even begun: baroque *retombée* – the effect precedes the cause. Monstrosity, leprosy, deformity are just names for the as-yet unintelligible. They are figures of speech that name what cannot yet be fully named since the events would make them intelligible have yet to unfold. The *Ursprung* might leap up from the most marginal of spaces, accreting detritus to the point where it turns into the most beautiful, irregularly shaped, exotic of pearls.

Rebellion arises from the “the great creative leprosy” (Lezama Lima 2010, 240) of New World Baroque, a baroque that accumulates revolutionary energy until the time is right for a new jump. Tarsila's memoirs, through their foregrounding of the monstrous and the contingency of the force of beginning promised by her paintings, reveal as much. Tarsila's *Abaporu* and *Antropofagia* are presented as sites – overdetermined by visual-verbal superimpositions – of unexpected leaps into the future. Speaking of *Abaporu*, she gives him/her/it narrative shape in the form of a “solitary, monstrous figure with immense feet” (Amaral [1939] 2009, 32), “a monstrous picture that even I didn't know how I had done it, nor why I had done it. It seemed somewhat monstrous to me. It was a little, tiny head with those enormous feet, sitting on a green surface” (qtd. in Bonet 2009, 243). The monstrous is the herald of a future, a future that cannot yet be known, and is only visible as monstrous, as an anomaly against the background of the everyday. The monster registers “an epistemological ambiguity and a saturation of visual and verbal signs that are characteristic of baroque aesthetics” (Moraña 2005, 276). Its true contours are not yet legible; it awaits a name as a way to negotiate its “epistemological ambiguity.” In the case of Tarsila's painting, the image is gifted a borrowed name, a name that plunges the image into the vertiginous depths of coloniality, with its violence, its scriptural-pictorial inscriptions, its forced conversions, the Afro-American, the Tupi,

the creole, the exploitation which made possible the rich heritage of the Barroco Mineiro. The name is ‘borrowed back,’ borrowed to the second degree: once transcribed by the Jesuit machinery of conversion, it is returned to the Tupi body, but only after the name had been altered forever, mixed into a baroque exchange of signs and images.

Tarsila’s memoir hints to this re-gifting, in that ‘monstrosity’ is the self-encoding of the New World baroque. It is as if Tarsila were unconsciously implicating herself within the rhetorical strategies of the baroque, making her text an ultra-baroque hypertext, a meditation – through the metaphor of the monstrous – on the artifice of origin and the primitive through a double simulation. ‘Abaporu,’ the name, the title is a figure of speech for a figure of speech: it is a metaphor for catachresis. It is impossible to tell whether one should doubt Tarsila’s sincerity – since it seems to follow a rhetorical ploy – or whether this baroquing of the baroque is the effect of retrospection, where the ‘new’ can only become legible through the work of artificialization wrought by neo-baroque and ultra-baroque accumulations of (scholarly) discourse. In short, we, because of our baroque ‘disciplining,’ are to blame for not believing Tarsila at her word, since her words echo all those other words and phrases; we have heard stories of such ‘monsters’ before. We ‘know’ that they try to name what cannot yet be properly named. As Roberto González Echevarría points out in *Celestina’s Brood*,

Monstrosity appears in the Baroque as a form of generalized catachresis, one that affects language as well as the image of self, and that includes the sense of belatedness inherent in Latin American literature (González Echevarría 1993, 5).

The image of self is an image of dispersal, a collage, an overlay of space-time discontinuums, the ‘belatedness’ of ghostly afterlives. The self is an anthology combining and recombining itself into an image that finds its ‘home’- its ‘soil’ - in the metaphor of the cannibal. In the end, it matters little whether we believe or disbelieve the ‘authenticity’ of Tarsila’s account, whether she wrote these words with ‘true feeling.’ What matters is the effect of ‘authority’ and authenticity. The author is not dead; he/she was never fully, ‘primitively’ alive – never fully ‘sense-certain’ – to begin with. The memoir is not the registration of affect for the purpose of its future retrieval – it is a combinatorics intent on the production of affect, in the same way *Abaporu* is a

superposition of coloniality, texts, and other images in a cycle of associations. The author is what survives throughout this baroque visual-verbal *Fortleben*, through an erudite superposition in the kaleidoscope of *ars memoria*. New World artificiality is the guarantee of authenticity, an authenticity that plays upon the chance of the art of combining, the risk of the throw of the dice of superposition that can alter the shape of history.

New World Baroque, through its insistence on contingency - as part of its rhetorical arsenal of tropes, making contingency at the same time strangely formulaic - thus acquires what José Lezama Lima dubbed the force of a 'counter-conquest' as against the imposition of Eurocentric, 'enlightened' and rational schematisms that regulate the flow of thought in a restricted economy of signification.³¹⁹ The American Baroque pushes the contrary potential of the Old World Baroque to its logical conclusion: the refutation of logic itself. Against the classical tabulations of reason, the baroque poses its monstrous law of inconstancy, its defiance of the principle of non-contradiction. As Mabel Moraña writes,

The anomalous or monstrous is the mark of an American difference that resists the perfection of the sphere, and, in addition, refutes the universality of its aesthetic value restoring in its place its singularity and contingency. In this way, American 'accidentalism' opposes the modernizing and Eurocentric 'Occidentalism' and reverts it (Moraña 2005, 246).

Accidentalism is the *modus operandi* of Oswald and Mário de Andrade's poetics. The anthropophagite novel *Macunaíma*, a collage of scraps of found object-texts, of ready-made ethnographic sentences pasted together, of things already said and written once before, telescopes its way back into the 'essence' of Brazil. Brazil, scene of the accident, of happenstance 'errors' of navigation, the land where fantastical beasts roamed in many a European Renaissance mind, the cosmic "semicolony" of a joke still awaiting its punch line (cf. Oswald de Andrade 1979, 4), the millionfold accumulation of mistakes, images, echoes, mixtures that comprise the heterogeneous repertoire known as 'Brazil': all this goes back to the accident of the birth of a nation. Particularity and contingency are

³¹⁹ Or, to use Haroldo de Campos's pithy characterization: "Lezama Lima, the Cuban who saw the miscegenation of the tropical-American Baroque as an art of counter-conquest" (Campos 2001, 376).

already inscribed within Brazil itself, a name that refers to a product the European market happened to prize so highly. In *Macunaíma*, Mário merely copied the incoherence of this Brazil, the ultimate site of its ‘origin’ being the “accidental Pedro Álvares Cabral, who, having by probable chance discovered Brazil for the probable first time, ended up claiming Brazil for Portugal” (qtd. in Madureira 2005, 86-87). Art is born as accident, in this strange encounter of the known and the monstrous, the latter shorthand for an epistemological short-circuit. Art gradually unfolds to make a new world understandable, as a way to start a new history, to have history make itself anew. “Whenever art happens – that is, whenever there is a beginning – a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again” (Heidegger 1971, 77). With antropofagia, history begins, resumes in a different guise in the ‘South,’ as a reprise of the perpetual self-renovation of the baroque. Antropofagia heeds the “disruptive impulses of colonial Baroque,” and as Neo-Baroque revenant it evokes “the origins of the imperial appropriation, explores the drama of colonialism and the possibilities of dis-aggregation and divergence—of de-totalization and fragmentation—of the models that represent absolute power and dogmatic truth” (Moraña 2005, 259). Antropofagia enters the back-and-forth of fragmentation and hybridization through superposition. Tarsila’s painting, *Antropofagia*, is the agglutination of *Pau-Brasil*, the new staccato poetry of Oswald, Mário’s ‘mimetic enthusiasm,’ Barroco Mineiro, *A Negra*, *Abaporu*: an unstoppable hyper-imagetext always beside itself.

Commenting on the façade of the Jesuit Church of San Lorenzo in the Bolivian city of Potosí (Figure 5.14, 5.15, 5.16), finished between 1728 and 1744 by the Quechua Indian architect José Kondori, José Lezama Lima points to the baroque tactic of superposition as a polemical, proto-revolutionary act of insubordination with respect to erudite, European canons of representation. As in his discussion of Aleijadinho’s nocturnal artistic subversions, Kondori’s Baroque agglutination is the locus of silent resistance through visual superposition, montage, and the anarchy that forces resemblance to take shape.

In the wilful stone mass of the Jesuit complex, in the flow of Baroque accumulation, and in the great tradition of the late Baroque, the Indian Kondori succeeds in inserting the Inca symbols of the sun and the moon, abstractly rendered, and Inca mermaids, oversized angels whose Indian

faces reflect the desolation of their exploitation in the mines. Even today we may take pleasure in guessing the reaction of the Jesuit fathers, who aspired to the pure expression of stone over the games of ornamentation and spirals. How did they view the unsought bonus that equated American leaves with Greek trefoils, the Inca half-moon with the acanthus foliage of Corinthian capstone, and the music of the *charangoas* with the sound of Doric instruments and the Renaissance *viola da gamba*? (Lezama Lima 2010, 236).

Lezama Lima points to work of aesthesis, the work of association and the superimposition of the Baroque. The leaf is neither American, nor Greek, but oscillates in a zone of indeterminacy, leaving the conceptual at a loss. The leaf defies clear identity, and moves between the one and the other, folding and refolding into itself, swirling up and down, with one side, perhaps through a modulation of the light, suddenly looking more Greek, while at other times appearing more and more Amerindian. The Inca half-moon softly lights up the Corinthian foliage, bespeaking the profoundness of juxtaposition, of unexpected assemblages, creating a type of knowledge transcending strict tabulations and categorizations. Baroque is not a synthesis; it is a superposition. Baroque is hybrid parataxis, the “unsought bonus” gifted by the ‘and’: being ‘and’ Greek, ‘and’ Inca, but neither in the end. This is the art of expenditure, producing unauthorized surpluses by taking of the ‘junk’ – the Inca remainder – and turning it into the leap of a new tradition. Baroque superposition is border gnosis, or rather, it is the deconstruction of the idea of the border – of a clear and distinct contour separating territories – through an anarchic shaping and reshaping. Here is no self-identity, but only self-differentiation through oscillation. It is the chiasm of superimposition and superposition: one can make out the Inca from the Greek but in the end, one cannot tell which is which. It is indiscernibility through the exploration of difference that prolongs the feeling of indeterminacy when face to face with aesthesis. There is no secret core identity here: a ‘hybrid identity’ is a contradiction in terms; it is a failure to engage with contradiction and is therefore too neo-classical for a hybrid palette/palate. The hybrid is dis-identity, it is polemos, refusing the coming together of the ‘is’ into the ‘ought.’



Figure 5.14 José Kondori, façade, Church of San Lorenzo, 1728-44. Potosí, Bolivia.
[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/16/Puerta_de_la_Iglesia_San_Lorenzo_Potos%C3%A1_D_Bolivia.jpg].



Figure 5.15 José Kondori, Detail, façade, Church of San Lorenzo, 1728-44. Potosí, Bolivia.
[<http://mw2.google.com/mw-panoramio/photos/medium/48083911.jpg>].



Figure 5.16 5.16. José Kondori, Detail, façade, Church of San Lorenzo, 1728-44. Potosí, Bolivia.
[http://farm1.static.flickr.com/108/315161943_521aefb0c5.jpg].

“Even today we may take pleasure in guessing the reaction of the Jesuit fathers, who aspired to the pure expression of stone over the games of ornamentation and spirals.” To imagine how neo-classicists received this recalcitrant play of matter, this unapologetic ‘bonus,’ this excess growth covering a building that should have celebrated

the stony implacability of a solemn culture would indeed make for great comedy. Laughter always shatters the scared with the irrepressible movement of the belly. The Jesuits must have found all this pagan *luxuria* in very ‘bad taste’ – but perhaps quite understandable given the ‘backwardness’ of the natives. Perhaps they found in it the incentive to increase their disciplining of an inconstant population. But this ‘bad taste’ is what tells the truth. The sacred temple becomes a space of remembrance of exploitation, with angels grooved by the lines, the lashes of slavery. This façade is not shallow: it is a clandestine condemnation, a secret visual reproach.

The neobaroque sign does not re-present in the sense of presenting again, but in the sense of dramatizing, and converting the world in spectacle, performance, and scenography. Society and politics - as defined by modernity - lose thickness and materiality. In their place, the opacity of the linguistic and visual sign suddenly appears, and the proliferation of the signifier calls attention to itself as the last horizon of social (self-) recognition. The Neobaroque sets up in this manner the dissidence, the difference, and the fold, saturating the void to make it visible (Moraña 2005, 263).

Made visible from the poetics of the Neo- or ultra-baroque, Tarsila’s paintings – with *Antropofagia* as the supreme superposition of discontinuities in space and time – are the site of the void. They are sites of memory, of laminations without ultimate ground – not even the soil of Brazil can prevent this dispersal. There is no *arkhé* functioning as secret ‘wellspring,’ as genetic point zero, there is no point of presence accounting for the boundless proliferation of images: the proliferation is its own site of origin, it does not revert to an Eidos, to a centripetal point anchoring image production. It is all a matter of art, the art of matter.

Chapter 6

6 The “Anthropophagite Manifesto”: Cannibal Genealogies and the Poetics of Radicalness

6.1 Introduction: The Inaugural Baroque Avant-Garde Banquet

There exists an alternate account of the birth of antropofagia. It is an apocryphal account in which Tarsila’s history of the eye is subsumed - or should one say, ingested - within the history of a belly, intensifying the already vertiginous play of colonial double-entendres through the gustatory idiom. The inaugural banquet scene fleshes out the already sumptuous rhetorical facade entangling the baroque with the avant-garde. As *retombée*, it reprises and transforms by performing, yet again, an *ars memoria*: a table, frog legs, an old travel account by a German adventurer are added and recombined in the refurbishing of an already impressive memory palace. The new citation adds a ‘bonus’ layer to the baroque superposition, thereby heightening the effect of etiological artifice. The words of Hans Staden’s 1557 *Warhaftige Historia und beschreibung eyner Landschafft der Wilden Nacketen, Grimmigen Menschfresser-Leuthen in der Newenwelt America gelegen* (True Story and Description of a Country of Wild, Naked, Grim, Man-eating People in the New World, America), are presented as the ground zero of antropofagia’s alternate origin. Staden, transcribing the words of the Tupi chief, who, upon seeing the German captive with his feet bound making his way into the settlement, conveys the Tupinambá’s joy upon seeing such a tasty, exotic European treat hopping along. Hans Staden did live to tell the tale however, escaping from the cannibal soil to immortalize Brazil’s gluttony.³²⁰ Again, Tupi and baroque enter a chiasmic interrelation: travellers, missionaries and conquerors spoke of ‘banquets’ when seeing or hearing of

³²⁰ There is ample literature on Hans Staden’s 1557 account as cannibal captive, which is available in a recent English translation by Neil Whitehead and Michael Harbsmeier, *Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil* (2008). For more details on Hans Staden’s description of cannibal scenes, see Donald W. Forsyth’s essay “Three Cheers for Hans Staden: The Case for Brazilian Cannibalism” (1985) as well as H. E. Martel’s “Hans Staden's Captive Soul: Identity, Imperialism, and Rumors of Cannibalism in Sixteenth-Century Brazil” (2006).

cannibal scenes, and Luis Madureira's account - a reciting of a memoir - further entangles the avant-garde with a colonial ultra-baroque sensibility through an ekphrasis of symposial delight.

In the beginning there was a banquet, for these were the Banquet Years of São Paulo. The restaurant where this inaugural symposium took place was renowned for its specialty: frogs' legs. As a tray brimming over with the delicacy was being brought to the table, Oswald de Andrade rose to toast not love but the batrachian. He then embarked on a parodic exposition of the theory of evolution, his main argument being that the frog (the same frog that the symposiasts were, at that very moment, tasting between measured sips of chilled Chablis) was man's evolutionary ancestor. Oswald's demonstration drew from such apocryphal authorities as the Dutch 'ovoists,' the 'homunculus' theorists, and the 'spermatists.' The cohost, painter Tarsila do Amaral, cut into her husband's peroration, remarking that the logical conclusion to his premise was that the banqueters were 'quasi-anthropophagi.' At the end of the ensuing playful analysis of the idea of Anthropophagy came the clincher, the quote from Hans Staden's 1557 captive narrative - a 'classic' of the genre: 'Here comes our food hopping toward us.' It was reportedly at this point that Oswald limberly executed his famous verbal sleight of hand, 'Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question.' Several days later, at her salon, Tarsila unveiled the painting, which Oswald is said to have christened *Abaropu* (the Tupi term for 'anthropophagus'). Out of a series of subsequent meetings emerged the *Revista de Antropofagia* (Review of Anthropophagy), in whose first issue appeared Oswald's 'Manifesto Antropófago' (May 1928) (Madureira 2005, 21-22).

Once the delicacy, a tray brimming with proto-anthropoi, has been digested, the eyes become attuned to a future recognition of the painted figure as a cannibal, the 'vomit of bad habits' (cf. Anchieta) coming back into view and demanding the name *Abaporu*, and a movement, antropofagia, in commemoration of this First Supper. The visual conversion through *Abaporu* was already proleptically commemorated through a modernist-baroque Eucharist - its Brazilian adaptation, since coloniality comes to the fore explicitly - of a French avant-garde scene where a Gallic delicacy is washed down by an exquisite burgundy white to institute a new tradition 'of the land.' In its paradoxical play between the 'imported' and the 'exported' - antropofagia traces the indiscernibility and ultimate absurdity of such strict distinctions - this scene is symptomatic of "class and cultural privilege, which, in a country where the illiteracy rate exceeded 75 percent in 1929, inevitably renders the poetic turn to the popular at once exoticizing and parochial" (ibid.,

22-23), instantiating a tension between the demotic and the aristocratic also characteristic of Torres-García's stance (see Part 1), as well as the global phenomenon of the avant-garde at large (cf. Madureira 2005, 23). Furthermore, the antropofagia banquet is a plagiarism of "'inaugural' colloquia, dinners, and salons that literary histories customarily link with literary modernity" (ibid.). It is a synecdoche of the avant-garde's informal, rambunctious anarchic spirit with its soirees, artistic gatherings and performances. As Madureira does not fail to remind us, these were indeed the 'banquet years' as described by Roger Shattuck in his classic account of French modernism, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I* (1968).

What Madureira does not notice however is how his own account 'copies' the 'unoriginality' he ascribed to the Brazilian modernists. It is not so much that the banquet, as 'historical event' as such lacks originality, or, in his words, that the "symposial setting is itself unoriginal" (Madureira 2005, 22). Rather, it is its continual retelling that incorporates it within a certain predictable rhetorical-discursive economy: the event is nothing but an effect of the art of visual description, with Madureira providing but one element in a potentially infinite recombination. As I have shown in the previous chapter, antropofagia is unperturbed by allegations of plagiarism and 'inauthenticity' - it sees authenticity as an exercise in rhetorical prowess and abandons itself to the ecstasy of 'Bacchanal' plagiarisms. Originality is a matter of effective recombinations that result in subversions and not so much 'new' versions. Madureira's ekphrasis re-cites (revisits) the 'inaugural' event and thereby produces it, giving a wholly 'unoriginal' version of it: it is a theatrical reproduction with small variations developing out of a matrix, while producing the latter always anew. Through a textual collage of quotes, we are reminded that the banquet is an avant-garde topos, with classical antecedents, while ultimately deriving from the platonic symposia. However, what Madureira forgets in the course of his commemoration of the lineage of the banquet is that his scene is itself a neo-baroque gymnastics doubling back onto the literary genre of the baroque banquet - a genre he fails to mention in his genealogy, a telling exception - with a rhetorical gustatory pleasure rolling off an erudite tongue. French erudition, the echo of academicism, is written into the anti-academic, 'neological' vernacular aspirations of Brazilian modernismo, destabilizing its *couleur locale*: the erudite and vernacular, the model and its deviations

are superimposed to the point of indistinguishability. Madureira's sumptuous *ars combinatoria* with its delight in a poetic arsenal 'brimming' with 'batrachians' and 'Chablis,' his 'measured sips' of erudition come together in an ultra-baroque superimposition, making his own retelling of the story "at once exoticizing and parochial" (ibid.). As José Lezama Lima writes of the baroque banquet, "the literary banquet, the prolific description of fruits of the earth and sea, is rooted in the jubilant Baroque." It is as "Dionysian as dialectic, ruled by the desire to possess the world, to incorporate the exterior world through the transformative furnace of assimilation" (Lezama Lima 2010, 222). The 'transformative furnace of assimilation' is an apt circumscription for antropofagia. Its overlaying, superposition, the accumulations of tensions, images, histories, all intersect in an art of expenditure. As such, Madureira's description is part of antropofagia's 'transformative furnace.'

In the end, the scene can be read as a parable. The taste buds are invoked as a polemical tactic, expressive of the extreme in particularity and idiosyncrasy: they are employed as a way to thematize the radical indeterminacy of aesthesis. Antropofagia presents itself in transgression of discursive cognition from the very outset. The incommunicability of culinary taste serves as rhetorical weapon against discursive cognition and its tabulation of repetition and variation into *grafismo*-like static models. The idiosyncrasy of the palate is the ground for antropofagia: it is born out of the aesthesis of the image, and the radical contingency of the gustatory arts: as such, it is anti-conceptual polemicism, an anthologizing of bits and pieces of tasty morsels. "Happiness is the proof of the pudding" is how one line runs in an English translation of Oswald's "Anthropophagite Manifesto" (Andrade 1998, 538). One may assume that the proof, in this case, is in the eating of the blood pudding. Antropofagia does not allow itself to be known without some form of initiation, some form of gustation – one has to develop a taste in the devouring of words, texts, images, or music by allowing the intensities and rhythms of colour, timbre, smells and musicality to take on density, relations and meaning. Even though it claims to be a radical de-education of the senses and uncompromisingly idiosyncratic, antropofagia is still premised on profound erudition, on the 'pudding' of coloniality and historical references. It is only on an over-educated palate that new tastes will stand out. The banquet scene is further testimony to

the chiasmus of the idiosyncratic and formulaic, of modernism and the baroque, or, to reprise Santiago's distinction, it follows the infinite movements of the dialectic between 'beginning' and 'origin' (cf. Chapter 5).

The Manifesto formulates the principle of the ecstasy of plagiarism in the motto "the only things that interest me are those that are not mine" (Andrade 1998, 536). That which is not mine is what determines my interest. My being is always 'in-between,' an allomorphic process formed through devouring, by regurgitating the words of others. This regurgitation is already hinted at through the word *antropofagia*, as the privileged term as opposed to the more common *canibalismo*. Already in the name, antropofagia evokes the mystery of coloniality: the modernist-baroque banquet scene cites Hans Staden's 'classic' travel narrative, fashioning antropofagia into a recalcitrant re-appropriation of a European topos. Staden's hopping makes us skip right back into Brazil's inscription within the North's scriptural-pictorial economy.

6.2 The Birth of the Cannibal

First published in 1928, Oswald de Andrade's "Anthropophagite Manifesto" is an anomalous intervention in a scriptural constellation.³²¹ The manifesto, the opening

³²¹ This section is but a summary overview of the construction of the cannibal in the imaginary of the 'North,' and is a way of setting up the ensuing discussion of Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago." Given this restriction, the following account is thus a highly condensed version of some of the salient traits of the rhetorical construction of the image of the cannibal, which will be supplemented, when addressing the work of Brazilian visual artist Adriana Varejão, by the 'in-visioning' of the cannibal within the 'North's' pictorial economy.

For a comprehensive overview of the cannibal's inscription within the West, Frank Lestringant's *Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne* (1997) is indispensable – I quote liberally from his work – and, to a lesser extent his *Mapping the Renaissance World: The Geographical Imagination in the Age of Discovery* (1994). Equally important in this respect is Philip Boucher's *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763* (2008). For the constitutive role of the Renaissance and Early Modern figure of the cannibal for the development of European political philosophy, see Cătălin Avramescu's *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism* (2009).

For more on the controversy surrounding William Arens's post-colonial 'revisionist' thesis proposed in *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (1979), which claimed that cannibalism was more of an Occidentalist myth serving ideological, colonial purposes than a widespread 'actual' practice, see *Cannibalism and the colonial world* (1998), edited by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen. See also Gananath Obeyesekere's *Cannibal Talk: The Man-eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas* (2005), which endorses Arens's position framing cannibalism as a rhetorical

declaration of the *Revista de Antropofagia* (Journal of Anthropophagy) - its inaugural 'dentition' as Oswald called the issues - highlights the problematics of the notion of origin and the contingency of the name.³²²

Indeed, why did these modernists settle on the name *antropofagia*, and not *cannibalismo*, or even *abaporuismo* - the latter in keeping with the indiginist mythos? The act of naming invokes a time of prior contingency, referring back to the moment of chance in which a modernist movement took up its name through a specific socio-historical frame. Antropofagia thus already thematizes 'accidentalism,' the 'millionfold' of 'native' and hegemonic errors that have congealed into the shaping of South America and Brazil. Héctor Olea (2004, 445) foregrounds the irreducible interrelation of coloniality and Latin American cultural production - its constitutive 'accidentalism' - through the formulation of the collective 'we' shaped by the outlines provided by others, which was precisely also the concern of antropofagia: "We – Latin American researchers and theoreticians, artists and the art we create – come from a tradition of misunderstandings and contradictions inherited from colonial times."

In fact, the name antropofagia is already a locus for the intersection of European avant-gardes, the colonial, the ancient Greek and the archaic - a crossroads of

ploy legitimating colonization. For anthropological accounts of cannibalism in South America that refute the 'metaphorization' of cannibalism as a mere ideological weapon and take the native informant 'at his/her word' so to speak, see Beth Conklin's *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in An Amazonian Society* (2001), advancing the thesis that Amazonian anthropophagy constitutes a ritual of mourning. In *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in An Amazonian Society* (1992), Eduardo Viveiros de Castro examines the cosmology of the Araweté, a Tupi-Guarani tribe, through their ritual anthropophagy. Based on his ethnographic research, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has formulated what he calls a 'Tupi ontology/philosophy,' which he develops most forcefully in *Métaphysiques cannibales: Lignes d'anthropologie post-structurale* (2009).

³²² A scholarly edition of the original Portuguese text of the "Manifesto Antropófago" is available in volume 6 of Oswald de Andrade's collected works *Do 'Pau-Brasil' a antropofagia e às utopias* (1972, 11-20). Incidentally, the same volume contains an insightful introduction to the manifesto by literary scholar Benedito Nunes, "A Metafísica Bárbara" (ibid., xxv- xxxvi). I have consulted two English translations, one annotated version by Leslie Bary (Andrade 1991, 38-47) and the translation by Adriano Pedrosa and Veronica Cordeiro (Andrade 1998, 536-539). In addition, the new French translation of the manifesto by Lorena Janeiro is highly recommended on account of its extensive annotations (Andrade 2011, 8-25).

misunderstandings. Paulo Herkenhoff notes that Oswald's *Revista de Antropofagia* was an adaptation of Picabia's *Cannibale*.³²³

Antropofagia finds in Dadaism an immediate precedent and in Picabia's *Cannibale* the apparent appropriation through the *Revista de Antropofagia*. Oswald knew *Cannibale*. His 'plagiarism' would be found in the same proportion of what Picabia's mechanical paintings are accused, portrayed as images of engineering magazines (Herkenhoff 1998, 42).

Antropofagia follows the ecstasy of plagiarism, through a New World ultra-baroque re-appropriation and re-translation of the name 'cannibal.' In crossing the Atlantic, the re-routing of the man-eater from Paris back to his 'native soil' of São Paulo, the 'cannibal' morphs into the 'anthropophagite.' In trying to account for this 'accident' of re-importation, Herkenhoff makes the unhelpful suggestion that one must "differentiate antropofagia – as a Brazilian cultural tradition – from cannibalism, the symbolic practice, whether real or metaphoric, of devourment of the other" (ibid., 36). This opposition between 'real' and 'simulated' devoration in terms of 'Brazilianness,' misses the point entirely. Antropofagia, as plagiarism gone wild through hyper-erudition, mocks the authenticity of the 'real' through a radical tactic of baroque artificialization. To recall Mário de Andrade's formula, antropofagia is interested "in satirizing Brazil through Brazil itself" (qtd. in Madureira 2005, 86-87), meaning that the image of what counts as 'Brazilian cultural tradition' will fluctuate with the interest in "what is not mine" (cf. Oswald). The "Manifesto Antropófago" exposes how a 'Brazilian cultural tradition' was rooted - through "routes, routes, routes, routes, routes, routes, routes" (Andrade 1991, 40) as Oswald formulates the manifesto's mantra – in exchange and the alloplastic inconstancy of the Tupi-baroque soul. In addition, as Leslie Bary points out in a gloss of her translation of Oswald's manifesto, "the original *roteiros* (from *rotear*, to navigate) can also signify ships' logbooks or pilots' directions. Oswald can thus be construed here as referring to a rediscovery of America" (Andrade 1991, 46 n15). The manifesto already hints at the transatlantic routes: the 'accident' of the discovery of the New Indies, the colonial apparatus that followed in its wake as well as the exchange between the

³²³ In the same publication, the first volume of the four-volume catalogue of the *XXIV São Paulo Bienal*, Dawn Ades explores the relation between dada, surrealism and antropofagia in greater detail in her essay "The Anthropophagic Dimensions of Dada and Surrealism" (in Herkenhoff 1998, 241-245).

cosmopolitan avant-gardes and the conceptual ‘poaching’ by Oswald, stealing back what was in a certain sense already ‘Brazil.’ Incidentally, there is also the ‘unexpected bonus’ provided by translation, in that the homonym in English between routes/roots points to the trajectories of origins. The fantasy of autarchy, the self-image of arborescent, deeply rooted traditions in terms of a ‘marble’ patrimony is compromised by the counter-image of malleable myrtle, a tradition always reaching out beyond itself tracing out new baroque routes.

‘Anthropophagy’ is a re-routing that has a parodic effect. Grounded in august Greek etymology - the deep ‘root’ European culture projects as its ‘own,’ as its essential rock-solid patrimony - antropofagia suggests that it wants to skip over colonial inscription altogether and return to the purity, the *arkhé* of the original word for man-eater. Paradoxically, it ends up elevating an archaism, a Greek word out of fashion. Indeed, Oswald’s “Anthropophagite Manifesto” revives an erudite, archaic term that had fallen out of grace in Europe and the South alike. In his study of sixteenth-century European travel narratives of the New World, Mário Klarer observes that “as early as the sixteenth century, the term ‘cannibal’ replaced the older ‘androphage’ or ‘anthropophage.’ The neologism [cannibal] thus changed from an ethnographic-geographical term into a general technical term for man-eater, and simultaneously serves as a *pars pro toto* for the new continent and its native inhabitants” (Klarer 1999, 391). The ‘neologic’ Oswald advocated in his *Pau-Brasil* manifesto is attained by the parodic re-appropriation of the archaic, erudite ‘anthropophage.’ Antropofagia’s language “without archaisms, without erudition. Natural and neologic. The millionaire-contribution of all the errors. The way we speak. The way we are” (Andrade 1986, 185) - hinges on *ars memoria*, i.e., the revival of an old word transposed into a different frame. The avant-garde gives the old a new force of life, a baroque *Fortleben* (cf. *supra*) that makes the most ancient appear as the most novel.

But what of the ‘cannibal’? How did this neologism - this ‘error’ - make its way into the canon, giving the word ‘anthropophagite’ polemical force in the constellation of Brazilian modernism vis-à-vis the ‘historical’ European avant-garde? In order to address this question a short detour outlining the inscription of the ‘androphage’ turned ‘cannibal’

is called for. In tracing the discursive origin of the ‘cannibal’ it becomes evident that the name is a misnomer - a constitutive error, a case of historic ‘accidentalism’ - generated through the confusion of disparate narrative imaginings. Christopher Columbus, who, as Andrea Giunta (1995, 54) reminds us “did not discover” but “verified and identified, mutilated and reduced,” set foot on the New World one day convinced that he had landed in the kingdom of the Great Khan of China. It was only logical that its inhabitants should be addressed as ‘Kannibals.’ Or, as the great ‘accidental discoverer’ himself puts it in his logbook dated 26 November 1492, speaking of the fear the ‘Kannibals’ provoke amongst other indigenous tribes,

All the people I have encountered up until this time greatly fear the people of Caniba or Canima. The Indians with me continued to show great fear, insisting that the people of Bohio had only one eye and the face of a dog, and they fear being eaten. I do not believe any of this. I feel that the Indians they fear belong to the domain of the Great Khan (Columbus 1987, 100).

This ‘epiphany’ rejects previous hypotheses, in an attempt to resolve a semantic quandary. In his fictional travel account so popular during the latter half of the fourteenth century, and having such a great influence on Columbus’s interpretative horizon, John Mandeville had already ‘disclosed’ cannibal practices amongst the so-called ‘Cynocephales.’³²⁴ “Men and women of that isle,” he reports, “have heads like dogs. If they capture any man in battle, they eat him” (1983, 134). Thus, Columbus ‘solves’ the riddle. Contrary to popular wisdom, which interprets the initial syllable of *Caniba* as deriving from the Latin *canis* (dog), the great ‘discoverer’ maintains it refers to ‘*can*,’ as “subjects of the Great Khan” (Klarer 1999, 391). Of course, this merely amounts to the supplanting of one misinterpretation by another, deriving from Columbus’s historic miscalculation.

Columbus’s logs not only draw on the travel diaries of Marco Polo and John Mandeville, they also call upon classical utopian topoi. The travelogues describe the New World in terms of the Earthly Paradise, by invoking Homer’s, Hesiod’s, and Ovid’s ‘expertise’ (cf. *ibid.*, 389-91). As a way to compensate for the lack of knowledge of the

³²⁴ For an extensive treatment on the figure of the cynocephalus, see David Gordon White’s *Myths of the Dog-Man* (1991).

New World, Columbus projects utopian rhetorical tropes in his descriptions of America, tropes that, in the Western canon at least, had been invariably accompanied by the “exotic motif of the man-eater” (ibid., 390). This illustrates the extent to which travel accounts such as Columbus’s are caught within a scriptural economy that must rely on authoritative, ancient sources in order to ‘command belief’ in the Old World. As Tzvetan Todorov shows in *The Conquest of America*, Columbus’s erudition, steeped in a specific regime of legibility we would now call ‘fantastic’ - or ‘marvellously real’ - already predisposes his eyes into ‘seeing things,’ since the navigator “believed not only in Christian dogma, but also in Cyclopes and mermaids, in Amazons and men with tails, and his belief, as strong as Saint Peter’s, therefore permits him to find them” (Todorov 1984, 16). The cannibal is thus born through a baroque superposition of images, citations and authorities, a true *proto-collage* figure made out of scraps of the most disparate sources, a walking condensation of rhetorical fragments, remembered back into wholeness through the *ars memoria* of textual and pictorial juxtapositions. The memory palace of Columbus’s mind makes visible a ‘new’ reality that is somehow already familiar. Indeed, this is the mode of verification and not of discovery, as Columbus

is not concerned to understand more fully the words of those who speak to him, for he knows in advance that he will encounter Cyclopes, men with tails, and Amazons. He sees clearly that the ‘mermaids’ are not, as he has been told, beautiful women; but rather than conclude that mermaids do not exist, he corrects one prejudice by another: the mermaids are not as beautiful as is claimed (Todorov 1984, 17).

In his essay “Montaigne’s ‘Of Cannibals’: The Savage ‘I’,” Michel de Certeau (1986) traces the heterological tradition - the discourse and ‘science’ of the other - of the travel narrative back to Herodotus’ *Histories*, where, in book IV, the Scythian, barbarian other is described in relation to Greek logos. Herodotus delivers a “testimony,” “addressed to the Greeks, which treats both the Greek and the Barbarian, both one and the other” (Certeau 1986, 68). The travel discourse constructs a place for itself through a distancing from previous sources in the “fabrication and accreditation of the text as witness of the other” so as to “command belief” (ibid., 69). With the discovery of the New World, the topology of the man-eater gained a new impetus while undergoing alterations. Structured as a travel account, Montaigne’s “Of Cannibals” is a humanist attempt to redeem the

man-eater within an “‘Apollonian vision’ of the savage, which was then competing with the diabolical figuration of the savage” (ibid., 75). The text can be read as a moralizing tract romanticizing the indigenous ‘American’ as the site of “‘beauty’ deserving of that name due to [its] utility to the social body” (ibid., 70), and thus acquire “ethical standing,” which Montaigne will employ to denounce the social ills of contemporaneous French society. As such, the discourse on the Other here serves an ‘internal’ political goal: the cannibal is thus the textual ‘means’ to a critical end. For that reason, the savage-cannibal receives the positive connotation of ‘naturalness’ as opposed to a degenerated and ‘artificial’ West.

Furthermore, the position of the cannibal is made available through the demise of the thirteenth and fourteenth century genre revolving around the figure of the *Idiotus*, the “anti-theological and mystical” informant who “adds no interpretation” to his experience. With the discovery of the New World, the genre of the travel narrative is injected with the force of the *Idiotus*, who is now superimposed onto the figure of the cannibal as locus of ‘naked,’ ‘natural’ - ‘neological’ as Oswald would put it - truth. As the teller of the unvarnished truth, “the cannibal came to rest in the place occupied by the *Idiotus*, which for two centuries had been the only place that could authorize ‘new language’” (ibid., 74). In the end, the cannibal is allowed entry – and even endowed with a halo – into the canonical ‘scriptural economy’ of a historiography caught up in the “circularity between the production of the Other and the production of the text” (ibid.). Centering on the twin issue of polygamy and cannibalism – vices that turn into virtues in Montaigne’s text – the savage is valorized through his bravery in battle (the captured savage even defying the enemy before being eaten), while polygamy is translated as self-less ‘generosity’ on the part of indigenous women, who will go out of their way to marry the most valiant warriors so as to produce the most courageous off-spring for the good of the community. As de Certeau points out with respect to Montaigne’s discursive strategy in order to ‘command belief’ by invoking ancient authority within a general dynamic geared towards the production of analogies,

to measure the virtue of cannibalism, comparison must be sought among the most heroic examples Greek courage has to offer (King Leonidas or Ischolas); in order to conceive of the generosity implied by polygamy, it is necessary to recall the most lofty female figures in the

Bible (Leah, Rachel, Sarah), as well as those of Antiquity (Livia, Stratonice). The finest gold tradition has to offer is used to forge a halo for the cannibals. God and the cannibal, equally elusive, are assigned by the text the role of the Word in whose name the writing takes place (Certeau 1986, 68-9).

As such, the speech of the other can only be approximated through writing and is further displaced because of its intersection with scriptural traditions so that “the narrative becomes the saying of the other, or it almost becomes it, because the mediation of an interpreter (and his ‘stupidity’), the accidents of translation, and the tricks of memory maintain a linguistic boundary line between savage speech and travel writing” (ibid., 70). In effect, heterological texts are always already misreadings, fashioning a “language in relation to that which it is unable to appropriate, that is to say, in its relation to a (t)exterior [*un hors-texte*]” (ibid., 73).

This attempt at appropriation is concomitant with the exclusion of those traits deemed incompatible with the phallogocentric premises of the ‘target’ language. The so-called ‘Bacchanal,’ or devilish aspects of the cannibal need to be suppressed in the construction of the noble ‘Apollonian’ savage. Because of its transgressive potential, Montaigne ‘brackets’ female participation in the cannibal feasts, so as to present the cannibal scene as if it “dealt only with political relations among the Tupi men” (Castro-Klarén 2000, 303). Therefore, a strict code of honour and vengeance, as a restoration of medieval chivalric values, is imposed on the ‘noble savage’ to facilitate his entry within a patriarchal logic. In summary,

Montaigne assimilates all that is possible to assimilate to a Christian, masculine and patriarchal code of vengeance and leaves out the rest – the feminine presence in the ritual – like disposable or indigestible matter (ibid.).

However, this move towards sameness encounters its limit. In order to prevent confusion between the ‘cannibal other’ and the ‘civilized self,’ a radical alterity must be re-installed. As Castro-Klarén points out, towards the end of the essay, Montaigne abruptly turns back on his humanist discourse of equality by insisting on “incommensurable difference” (ibid., 304). This interruption must keep the Tupinambá Indian at bay as the latter poses the danger of a proximity too close for (European) comfort:

In plain truth, these men are very savage in comparison to us; of necessity, they must either be absolutely so or else we are savages; for there is a vast difference betwixt their manners and ours (Montaigne, qtd. in Castro-Klarén 2000, 304).

It is, indeed, a very plain truth, or “sans mentir,”³²⁵ as Montaigne notes in the French version ([1580] 1992, 212). Without this ‘truth,’ through this absence of lying, Montaigne can re-assert absolute difference, or an “enormous distance” - “une merveilleuse distance” (ibid.). Paradoxically, he does so by putting himself into the position he had reserved for his savage, the plainspoken *Idiotus*, who is marked as ‘innocent’ through a lack, the lack of artifice, i.e. the very inability to lie or dissimulate. The lack now becomes a duplication of rhetoric: Montaigne clothes himself in the robes of the *Idiotus* whose truth precisely derives from his nakedness.

To make the paradoxical inversion complete, the essay ends by making this absolute alterity, this ‘incredible distance,’ revolve around a piece of clothing, viz. “breeches.” The conclusion of the essay is a reversal of the ‘absolute difference’ previously established: “All this is not too bad – but what’s the use? They don’t wear breeches” (1958, 159). Their lessons will go unheeded as they lack the proper decorum. The absence of fabric will make Montaigne’s lesson – and by extension that of the savages – fall on deaf ears and gluttonous eyes. The moral of the story will be lost on civilization since the Tupi lack the clothing to drape their truths in: *ars rhetorica*. Furthermore, in the reduction of absolute difference to a matter of wardrobe, the cannibals still retains the power of truth through their nakedness, implying that once we drop our breeches we might attain enlightenment, a rapprochement to unmediated insight, a nudist Rabelaisian revelation of nature in the midst of decaying culture. The solution to

³²⁵ “De vray, ils ne cessant jusques au dernier souspir de le braver et deffier de parole et de contenance. Sans mentir, au pris de nous, voilà des hommes bien sauvages ; car, ou il fait qu’ils le soyen bien à bon escient, ou que nous le soyon : il y a une merveilleuse distance entre leur forme el la nostre” (Montaigne [1580] 1992, 212). The original French is also quoted in Castro-Klarén’s essay (2000, 304), but I home in on the parodic association of ‘sans mentir’ and the *Idiotus* figure, where the ‘naked truth’ is dressed up in the rhetorical garb of the plainspoken fool. The French creates a tension between ‘truth’ – “de vray” – and lying – “sans mentir” – which becomes doubly ironic when read against Oswald’s most erudite call for an ‘unclothed’ truth, which effects a dazzling rhetorical operation that thematizes the nakedness of truth while overindulging in the artifice of lying, of polemical citation, of the endless quote. The fool is the most learned of them all, showing up the rhetoric of the ‘plain truth’ for what it is: word-play. Castro-Klarén does not discuss the French version.

Europe's problems could be overcome by disrobement, by dis-investiture, by de-repression. Here is the 'unclothed truth' Oswald reprises in his "Cannibal Manifesto," echoing Montaigne in stating that "what clashed with the truth was clothing, that raincoat placed between the inner and outer worlds. The reaction against the dressed man" (Andrade 1991, 38). Overall, the 'distance' does not seem all that great; it is an arbitrary, merely 'textile' – intertextual – difference, a relational matter between the naked and the clothed, the raw and the cooked. In the end, this 'enormous distance' is only skin-deep, and merely a matter of covering up, of modesty, of learned behaviour. If 'custom is our nature' (cf. Pascal), then a new nature is merely a matter of adopting an unc customary – un-costumed – costume. Oswald's unclothing of truth superimposes Montaigne's rhetoric of disrobement, culminating in a kind of transatlantic mirror of polemical exhibitionism.

In sum, what this shows is how the cannibal becomes a rhetorical figure in a specific, Western discursive formation. The cannibal is the figure of speech – the 'pretext' – signifying the lack of rhetoric. Montaigne's cannibal, in denouncing the devastation the religious wars wrought in Rouen – a ruinous cityscape in which the Tupi are welcomed as 'guests' by a 'infant' King and shown the 'splendours' of superior European civilization riven by internal warfare – is the plain speaker, a figure of speech within a textual economy where the European intellectual had to bite his tongue. Indeed, Frank Lestringant also points to the contradiction between European erudition and 'savage honesty,' of a figure of innocence and nature against a 'ground' of civilizational decadence, a contrast that grants Montaigne's intervention such critical power. On the occasion of the festivities surrounding Charles IX's glorious entry in 1562 into the reconquered city of Rouen – celebrating the Catholic victory over Protestant dissidence – Tupi Indians had been imported to take part in the spectacle so as to show off the power of the monarch.

Here, then, is Montaigne, against the background of a city that has been taken by storm and laid half in ruin, talking to us about a subject which seems quite irrelevant: the Cannibal, who has just disembarked from Brazil and were, to say the least, taken aback by the disorder which they found in this highly civilized Europe, whose merits the missionaries had so insistently described to them during their voyage. Far from voicing the expected admiration, they expressed only doubt and astonishment. Certainly, their proud replies were such to perplex their

royal interlocutor. They were astonished by this child king, still more taken aback by the juxtaposition of rich and poor, and wondered how the latter ‘could endure such injustice without taking the others by the throat and setting fire to their houses’ (Lestringant 1997, 1-2).

On Lestringant’s and de Certeau’s reading, the cannibal thus operates as a rhetorical figure allowing for covert, camouflaged polemics through the ruse of exoticism. Montaigne imputes political concepts onto the Tupi guests, concepts that are critical of the current devastating political situation in Europe, and which are reframed within a European matrix of socio-political legibility. As such, the cannibal becomes a figure for ‘internal consummation’ – that is to say, he is employed, tactically, as the incarnation of a more humane, equitable and just way of life; a more ‘natural’ man, unspoilt by the decadence of civilization. But given his ‘marvellous distance,’ the cannibal can always be consumed as exotica, as an unclothed curio, a monstrosity whose true meaning is enigmatic, and whose lesson – as Montaigne admits in the final coup of the essay – will have no effect. It will have been useless to get through to these vainglorious Europeans who have eyes only for humorous breaches of decorum.

According to Lestringant, however, Montaigne’s cannibal was not so much the superposition of the *Idiotus* as a rhetorical trope onto which the now fading chivalric ideal of European Medieval literature was re-projected. By foregrounding the ‘defiant cannibal speech,’ Montaigne supposedly sublimated the cannibal to the extent that his orality only concerned speech, and not the ingestion of the sacred enemy. Instead, what such disembodied regimes of legibility effect is the obscuring of

the real physical presence of the plumed and tattooed Indian, with his necklace of teeth and his bone flute, is forgotten in favour of an evanescent and idealized double, a modern avatar of the naked philosopher beloved of Plato and Sextus Empiricus (Lestringant 1997, 9-10).

Such a reading of the savage, by focusing exclusively on the ritual speech of the cannibal victim, who, prior to his death, could prove his valour in speech, idealizes “the violent act of eating, to shift the noise of teeth and lips toward the domain of language” (ibid., 12). This cannibal ‘speech act’ foregrounds the final moment of the cannibal rite where the captive is face to face with his executioner, just before the latter smashes his skull with the ritual club. In a reversal of roles, the prospective cannibal meal takes up a locus of

enunciation situated in a future anterior, promising imminent revenge for the fate about to befall him. At the same time, the ‘canibalee’ performs an *ars memoria*, re-membering his own past ingestions, the repasts he partook of, having digested parts of the ancestors of the clan that is about to devour him. By eating and devouring me, you are also devouring your own brothers whom I have ingested. By ingesting me, you condemn yourself to a future defeat at the hands of my own brothers, who will come to avenge me - this, in short, is the logic of the cannibal speech from the perspective of the ‘victim.’ Anchieta adduces the cannibal logic of valour as one of the main reasons why conversion is so slow amongst the Tupi, since the Tupi warrior

wanted to die a famous death and prove his valor, in the main square tied with very long ropes around his waist, which three or four young men would hold well stretched out, he started to say, ‘Kill me, for you certainly have in me that of which you can avenge yourselves, since I ate so-and-so your father, this brother of yours, and that son of yours’ - making a great deal out of the many that he had eaten belonging to those others, with such great enthusiasm and festivity, that it seemed more that he was going to kill the others than be killed (qtd. in Castro 2011, 67).

Here, again, is Tupi inconstancy at work: past and future are superimposed; victim and aggressor become indistinguishable within the ritual moment of polemical speech. Lestringant insists that “from the late 1550s onwards, standard French wisdom on the subject,” increasingly reflected “the symbolic interpretation of a rite of vengeance, variously transcribed by André Thevet, Jean de Léry and Michel de Montaigne, which has nothing to do with ordinary hunger” (Lestringant 1997, 23). With Thevet, Montaigne and Léry, cannibalism would attain a distinctly symbolic interpretation in terms of a rite of vengeance, and made to resemble the waning aristocratic values of chivalry – perpetuated in medieval chivalric literature – which were becoming anachronistic with the dawn of the modern age and urban subjectivity.³²⁶ Ritual vengeance was a means of resignification: it allowed for the projection of anachronistic values upon the body of the cannibal, allowing the cannibal to appear more and more as a lost ideal. The cannibal thus became a figure of mourning charged with nostalgia. The structure of this projection

³²⁶ For more on Jean de Léry’s *Histoire d’un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* (1578), another ‘classic’ in the travel narrative genre, see Janet Whatley’s. “Impression and Initiation: Jean de Léry’s Brazil Voyage” (1989). Incidentally, Léry’s account, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, is available in a translation by Janet Whatley (1992).

of a 'natural aristocracy' - as against an over-civilized, decadent barbarity - would be extended into the nineteenth and twentieth century through the figure of the 'primitive.'

Furthermore, the territorialization of cannibalism into a symbolic, figurative, ritual meaning – with a focus on the speech of the cannibal rather than his act of devoration – during the period of the discoveries and the Renaissance was also effected through the proximity with the notion of transubstantiation and the Eucharist. To ward off the danger of the association, Counter-Reformation ideology would try to cover up any literal readings, while the Protestants, as soon as their influence in South America increased, did not hesitate to play up the association between cannibalism as physical, abject act close to the 'repugnant' dogma of transubstantiation as sacrilegious theophany.³²⁷

However, the idealized, symbolic reading would come under increasing pressure in the nineteenth century. Under the dictates of the positivist paradigm, cannibalism was subjected to literal readings divesting the ritual of all symbolic power, or at least the rituals surrounding the practice were reframed as mere legitimating epiphenomena intent on retrospectively endowing a base, nutritional act with sacred meaning. From such a hermeneutics of suspicion, cannibal practitioners were typecast as mere animals "subject to a hostile environment and bereft of all liberty," transforming them from valiant aristocrats of nature into "no more than eaters, predators without conscience or ideal, who, in times of severe famine, turned their hunger against their own race" (Lestringant 1997, 5). At the end of the nineteenth century this epistemic shift in the regime of

³²⁷ The Cannibal was a figure of contention over which the religious wars were staked out. The figure of the cannibal was central in ideological debates between Reformists and Counter-Reformists, and was used especially by the Protestants as a means to discredit Catholicism by pointing to the similarity between cannibalism and the dogma of transubstantiation, and their shared 'barbarity.' In *Icon and Conquest: A Structural Analysis of the Illustrations of de Bry's 'Great Voyages'* Bernadette Boucher highlights the pictorial logic of the engravings in Theodor de Bry's *Great Voyages*, published in instalments between 1590 and 1634. De Bry's (and his sons' who continued his work after his death) images stress the proximity between the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation and Tupi cannibalism. In fact, *The Great Voyages* evinces a Protestant ideology in the making – the de Bry family fleeing Catholic persecution and settling in the safe haven of Strasbourg – in which the Tupi's Edenic innocence is corrupted by Spanish Catholic conversion, thereby transposing the scene of the counter-Reformation onto the 'South.' As Bucher observes with respect to one engraving, "the expulsion of Adam and Eve takes place because they accept fruit from a stranger; the plundering of the Caribbeans, because they gave fruit to a foreigner; the cultural regression of the Tupinambá, because they eat the [Catholic] stranger" (Bucher 1981, 85).

legibility of the cannibal culminated in the image of the ‘moral monster,’ the penultimate (mostly literary) figure of a civilization in decay, a sure sign of the corrupting influences of modernity and industrialization where enlightenment optimism made way for Romantic gloom. The cannibal is the anti-hero, the decadent ‘sensualist’ of unreason lurking under the thin veneer of society, in which cannibalism is associated with eroticism, sadism, excess and Sadean banquets of the unspeakable. The cannibal becomes a mirror image, a ‘diagnostic’ figure showing all the symptoms of a disoriented humanity destined to self-destruction and excess, a figure – however literal – of the barbarism secretly animating enlightenment and the idea of progress itself. In Freud’s genealogical account *Totem and Taboo* for instance, cannibalism becomes the founding act of Western civilization itself, as its hidden truth, as the guilt residue inhabiting our unconscious, and persisting in the form of the super-ego’s incest taboo and the interdiction against patricide (and theocide).³²⁸ Against this hermeneutics of suspicion, against determinist and biologist readings of cannibalism that pretend to know the truth behind the façade of the anthropophagic ritual – that it is merely a cover-up, a sublation of more basic instincts – Oswald’s manifesto calls for “the transfiguration of the Taboo into a totem. Cannibalism” (Andrade 1991, 42), as the means to unmake patriarchal society – “paterfamilias and the creation of the Morality of the Stork” (ibid.) and return to the “the matriarchy of Pindorama” (ibid, 43), theophagy of the Father so as to make time start anew in a matriarchal counter-temporality. Even these literalizing, disenchanting readings effect a comparable operation in that they fail to deal with the abject ‘remainder’ of anthropophagy. Both the symbolic and the literal reading of cannibalism amount to an exorcism of what they purport to explain. While the symbolic reading idealizes the act of

³²⁸ Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (2001). For more on the Freudian notion of primitivism, taboo, subjectivity in relation to modernity, see, amongst many others, James J. DiCenso’s “Totem and Taboo and the Constitutive Function of Symbolic Form” (1996), Rachel B. Blass’s “The Role of Tradition in Concealing and Grounding Truth: Two Opposing Freudian Legacies on Truth and Tradition” (2006), and Celia Brickman’s “Primitivity, Race, and Religion in Psychoanalysis” (2002). For an excellent discussion of the trope of cannibalism in Western (literary) discourse, extending from Homer all the way Herman Melville, see Maggie Kilgour’s *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (1990). For a discussion of cannibalism in relation to literature and coloniality, from Montaigne to Melville and Naipaul, as well as its rhetorical function in Freud and Roland Barthes, see Roger Célestin’s *From Cannibals to Radicals: Figures and Limits of Exoticism* (1996). For an extended account on the thematic interrelation of cannibalism, modernist literature and melancholia, see Daniel Birnbaum and Anders Olsson’s *As a Weasel Sucks Eggs: An Essay on Melancholy and Cannibalism* (2008).

speech only to obscure the transgression of the ‘culinary,’ the literalist reading resignifies the practice as a mere ‘example’ of the ‘law’ of nature, supposedly adopting an ‘objective’ stance that in fact “achieves at little cost a continuous exorcism. The body of the savage (who has now declined into a primitive) pays the price. Thrust back into the ancestral forest, penned into a distant island, the cannibal nonetheless continues to people our imagination and haunt our present day” (Lestringant 1997, 12).

In “our present day,” perhaps following Lacan’s lead exposing the (phantasmatic) ‘cannibalistic’ thrust at the heart of subjectivization, the cannibal, in contemporary theoretical discourse at least, has been re-semanticized as a name for the voracity and expansionism of Western logos itself.³²⁹ This rhetorical cannibalism – a new regime of legibility, a new figuring of a figure of speech – has become a trope addressing and condemning the totalizing drives of Western culture, which gobbles up difference in a synthesizing Same, as the dark ‘exotic’ heart animating the totalizing drives of the enlightenment extending into the logic of late capitalism. Cannibalism has become a byword for globalization and the rule of identity-thinking premised on the suppression – the devouring – of all traces of alterity. It is only within such a paradigm of legibility that Luce Irigaray’s “anti-cannibalistic ethics of love” can become intelligible as countering the “cultural threat of the appropriation of the other” (Deutscher 1999, 160), or, how on Derrida’s account, deconstruction could be premised on the “failure of this appropriation” (ibid., 161), by indicating how alterity always returns to ‘haunt’ the discursive edifices pretending homogeneity – deconstruction constructs itself on the idea of a counter-cannibalism. Incidentally, this is also how the cannibal in Donald Preziosi’s conception of museocannibalism functions, with the cannibal operating as the metaphor for a self-serving, all-devouring panoptic eye that appropriates otherness according to its schemes of tabulation and categorization, blind to resistant regimes of legibility.³³⁰ In short, museocannibalism, and cannibalism in general, have become figures for the

³²⁹ Allow me to quote but one passage from Jacques Lacan’s Seminars that seems characteristic of the trope of cannibalism in its current usage in theoretical discourse from the hegemonic centres of theoretical good taste: “Le sujet vient se placer sur le menu à la carte du cannibalisme, dont chacun sait qu’il n’est pas jamais absent d’aucun fantasme communionnel” (Lacan 2001, 190).

³³⁰ In Chapter 4, I elucidate Preziosi’s notion of museocannibalism in relation to the exhibit *Inverted Utopias*.

epistemic violence of coloniality, the evil drive of Western thought, the savage within and not located, far away, ‘over there,’ on some tropical isle. In a sense then, the ‘error,’ the ‘accident’ of cannibalism has come back home, radically reinscribing itself within the scriptural economy to the point where it has become the metaphor for that very same scriptural economy.³³¹

However, through the employment of the ‘cannibal’ within a rhetorical arsenal, the abject remainder of what the taboo invokes is never taken seriously. The idiosyncrasy, the irreducible aesthesis of anthropophagy – the baroque banquet that superimposed everything upon everything – is replaced by a master metaphor that is merely a handy concept signifying an operation of mainly symbolic violence. There is always a remainder that cannot be accommodated by such interpretative schemas, especially when they set themselves up to combat their own self-made image of cannibalism, with the latter conveniently functioning as shorthand for a totalizing, architectonic, repressive hermeneutic economy. As Lestringant insists, “cannibalism is not susceptible to rationalization There is always something left over: an inassimilable horror, a condensation of the unspeakable which attracts the most lively repulsion” (Lestringant 1997, 70). The body always comes back, the sound of the smacking lips of the cannibal-eater return to haunt and subvert ready-made rhetorical ploys that merely make room for cannibalism as a cover-concept, a diagnostic catch-all. In fact, the monological appropriation of cannibalism as a concept for epistemic totalization replicates the conceptual totalization it is intended to critique. It leaves no room for the palate, for the disturbing ‘bad taste’ of its history, its rootedness and routes through coloniality. As such, current theoretical discourse, to the extent that it grounds its

³³¹ These are merely preliminary observations signalling a certain ‘mood.’ To formulate things in a caricature, contemporary discourse seems to have cast Hegel in the role of arch-cannibal, with the notion of *Aufhebung* – as least as it has been presented (subjected to reductive interpretations) in the works of Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and others – has become a caricature for the ‘cannibalistic’ operations of Western logos, making it somewhat of a rhetorical commonplace, a straw man-cannibal argument. However, there has been no critical account to date on the rhetorical strategy behind the cannibal figure in contemporary philosophical-theoretical discourse, and given the scope of the present essay, it cannot be developed here. However, there are some accounts that sketch the contours of the problem, such as C. Richard King’s “The (Mis)uses of Cannibalism in Contemporary Cultural Critique” (2000). See also some scattered remarks in Daniel Cottom’s *Cannibals and Philosophers: Bodies of Enlightenment* (2001).

own activity as counter-cannibalistic, has merely gobbled up a concept from elsewhere and employed it for ‘domestic’ consumption, in a retro-proleptic pastiche of Oswald de Andrade’s appreciation for the polemical force of cannibalism, as a means for antagonistic anthologizing, a counter-conceptual, parodic insistence on ‘bad taste’ as a means to negate erudition through its gluttonous devoration.

With this in mind, one can read Oswald de Andrade’s “Anthropophagite Manifesto” as an anomalous intervention in the heterological scriptural constellation. At first glance, the Manifesto’s transvaluation of the savage-cannibal corresponds to the utopian promise of a Latin American modernism inscribed within the dialectic between an ‘indigenous’ tradition and the canonical Western modernist avant-garde, in the hopes of effecting a genuinely Latin American synthesis. However, as with most first impressions, this perspective warrants further investigation. De Andrade’s text in fact highlights the problematics of the semantic cluster of terms such as ‘genuine,’ and ‘indigenous,’ which reveal a preoccupation with rendering the notion of *arkhé* as transparent, as natural. The latter is precisely Oswald’s subject of contention, and as such, it indicates a profound ambiguity with respect to utopian imaginings. Juxtaposed to the cannibal as pretext or misunderstanding, Oswald’s anthropophagite, as the index of a dynamic, becomes a paradoxical figure of resistance through the re-appropriation and displacement of a logocentric metaphor that, under Oswald’s superpositions, figures under the rubric of an ‘appetite’ for contradiction rather than being a mere byword for repressive synthesis. As such, framed through a South American ultra-baroque banquet, antropofagia becomes a tactic of “cultural emancipation” (Herkenhoff 1998, 36), “a dynamic concept capable of establishing a validity for our times” (ibid., 37).

6.3 The Erudition of the ‘Permanent Contradiction’: The Manifesto Antropófago

The “Manifesto Antropófago” is an uncompromisingly erudite text transcribing the desire for absolute unlearning. Oswald’s battle cry is the glottographic transcription of the impossibility of the utopian primitivist dream image. The manifesto ‘speaks’ in paradoxes through an erudite hypertext, giving shape to de-repression through the discipline of language, with its phonetic and grammatical rules and regulations. The manifesto is theatre: it stages the antinomy of trying to reach a beyond, a future imagined through the nostalgia for Eden and Arcadia, a time before time, a space of no place in particular. The manifesto, so full of desire, tiresomely repeating the mantra of “we want,” yearns for a condition prior to corruption and academicism, before grammar books and rules, before Brazil’s dislocation from its own happiness – “before the Portuguese discovered Brazil, Brazil had discovered happiness” (Andrade 1991, 42) – by negating the civilization of the Book with its one true word - Logos. But ‘want’ must be written down. It must be recorded for posterity, so that future generations can remember this “Carib Revolution” (ibid., 39) Oswald speaks of. The manifesto calls for a leap into the future via an impossible forgetting: the more the manifesto advocates dis-remembering, the more images it superimposes, and the more words it assembles in its absurd attempt to write itself out of history, trying so desperately to make it begin anew, but differently perhaps, this time – only to entangle itself in history all the more. The manifesto is tragicomic: it knows, deep down, that its parody is tragic, speaking in borrowed and re-borrowed words, having to speak its truth through the mouths of others, through citation, through repetitions, through the staging of a masterful, authoritative discourse steeped in arcana, in the erudite, the affected - intolerable pedantry.

To be perfectly clear: just as Severo Sarduy insists that “Cuba is not a synthesis, a syncretic culture, but a superposition” (Sarduy 1989, 56) it must be remembered, once and for all, that the manifesto is not a synthesis, but a superimposition of strata, of incompatibilities that does not give rise to a glorious mixture, to a ‘hybrid identity,’ but to the dis-identity of the hybrid. Oswald calls this accumulation of tensions, images, and

quotations the principle of the “permanent contradiction” (ibid., 43). The manifesto raises the stakes and intensifies the paradox between the desire for ‘nature’ and its irreducible artifice: nature itself becomes visible as the effect of *ars combinatoria*, of heaping citations and images - Brazilian landscapes, historical scenes, etc. - on top of each other so as to build a mountain from which to survey one’s own vista of artifice. The manifesto is written by an erudite savage, transcribing his speech in some sort of ethnographic fiction in which the cannibal revolutionary takes up the pen to write down his experiences, like a freed slave just having learned how to write, only to find out that “everything has already been written” (Borges 1998, 87),³³² all experience, no matter how personal, is somehow already ‘accounted’ for. The disciplined, schooled savage, writes in commemoration of the beginning of the Cannibal Revolution, a clandestine revolution started as soon as the Portuguese diocesan, Dom Pedro Fernandes Sardinha, on his way to convert Brazil and become its first bishop, was captured in 1556 and eaten by the Tupi-Guarani tribe of the Caeté. This clandestine “counterconquest” as Lezama Lima (2001; 2010) calls it, commencing “in the 374th Year of the Swallowing of Bishop Sardinha” (Andrade 1991, 44), would be disseminated in the New World through the baroque, a subversive vehicle through which Kondori and Aleijadinho would propagate their coded, hybrid insurrection.³³³

Brazilian history started with a counter-conversion, the swallowing of this Portuguese Catholic ‘sardine.’ As Alfred Jarry reminds us, “there are two ways, as everyone knows, to *do* anthropophagy: to eat human beings, or to be eaten by them” (Jarry 2001, 250; emphasis in original). This is a fundamental insight that Oswald takes to heart. Through the initial devoration of Dom Pedro Fernandes Sardinha, the Christians, having thereby in effect become cannibals, had been converted to *antropofagia*. Furthermore, this process of conversion would prove unstoppable from that point on:

³³² “The certainty that everything has already been written annuls us, or renders us phantasmal” (Borges 1998, 118). This diagnosis by the narrator of “The Library of Babel” (ibid., 112-118) is certainly not shared by antropofagia, which revels in the possibility of subversive plagiarism the always-already written offers. There will always be more writing, ‘more’ of the “infinite” (ibid., 118). It is this paradox ‘baroque reason’ (cf. Buci-Glucksmann) extols.

³³³ I discuss the work of Kondori and Aleijadinho in chapter 5, in reference to my discussion of the New World baroque counterconquest.

“But those who came here weren't crusaders. They were fugitives from a civilization we are eating” (Andrade 1991, 41). What is still in the process of being devoured is the word, erudition, glottographic writing, a regime of visibility/legibility mobilized against these self-proclaimed ‘crusaders’ and missionaries. Writing gave antropofagia the necessary means to communicate its revolutionary program of de-programming, to have it go viral, to insert itself within the flow of global capital, insinuate itself in the mercantile routes of brazilwood, creating a planetary solidarity: “Cannibalism alone unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically. The world's single law. Disguised expression of all individualism, of all collectivisms. Of all religions. Of all peace treaties” (ibid., 38). Oswald writes the way Caliban speaks. He curses, but eloquently, to the point where praise and insult, seeming and being become indiscernible. ‘Custom’ and ‘nature,’ are made baroque in chiasmic intertwining. Oswald follows Blaise Pascal in his dictum that “custom is our nature” (Pascal 2005, 215), and that “nature is itself only a first custom, as custom is a second nature” (ibid., 34). Oswald invokes all the right books, the right customs, all the correct authorities to let ‘nature,’ the primitive speak: Shakespeare (with a tropical twist, to be sure), Freud, Keyserling, Anchieta, William James, José de Alencar, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and many others; all pass in this samba macabre, one name having become more obscure than the other owing to the diligence of history. Oswald recites all the right names - a veritable nomenclature this poem-manifesto of his - in the space of a memory palace, juxtaposing one so as to jump freely to the other, all the while voicing a desire to begin again, to return to a time without taboos, a time without names or dates, without history as the procession of ‘victorious’ names: “the undated world. Unrubrified. Without Napoleon. Without Caesar” (Andrade 1991, 41). The voice of desire is made to speak in the order of legibility that the ‘North’ - the ‘they’ of the text, the cannibal’s sacred enemy – can understand. Oswald must speak in the tongue of coloniality, of erudition and bookishness, of references and allusions, to make his desire known, a desire which is not even his, but a projection of that of his enemies. The manifesto makes Spengler speak from the Amazon, showing that the continent of the future – the ‘future’ being such a European, teleological concept of deferral – was nothing but a European delusion, the *fata morgana* of ‘pure nature’ and the fullness of lost speech expressly concocted by the cannibals so as to lure Europe, with its nostalgic ‘crusaders,’

into their homes, so they could satiate themselves on white meat, ‘hopping along’ like Hans Staden, right into the cauldron.

The manifesto is a verbal collage, a collection of aphorisms coming from elsewhere, alluding, cryptically, to a history of philosophical texts, literature, and ethnography: it is composite, a juxtaposition of metaphors resisting closure. It is a dense text drawing up routes and mappings, condensations of coloniality so as to image a counter-genealogy. The principle of superposition impresses itself when reading the manifesto, when allowing the aesthesis of the text to do its work. The text ‘speaks’ in staccato; there is nothing ‘fluid,’ ‘harmonious’ about it. It is abrupt, short, the accumulation of one line after the other separated by a sparse horizontal line, indicating the layering - the archaeology - of thought. Oswald’s art is the art of combination through disconnecting, it is the art of parataxis, of saying too little - it evinces that avant-garde aristocracy of mind unwilling to compromise with filler. The text is all marrow, all nutrient. As Haroldo de Campos points out, Oswald’s poetics is a radical poetics, that is to say, in the words of Marx, Oswald “grasps things by the root. But for man the root is man himself” (qtd. in Campos 2007, 201). Antropofagia cuts language down to its roots, unearths the “millionaire-contribution of all the errors” (Andrade 1986, 186), cuts and remembers man through a sparse baroque, a Spartan, minimalist baroque cutting down Parnassian outgrowths. Cutting things down to their roots - to the minimal point of most intensive energy - is the condition of possibility for routings, for new associations, for the maximization of condensed energies to proliferate into series of associations, analogies, memories, glosses. Oswald’s radical poetics, its telegraphic style that short-circuits all talk of ‘synthesis’ in advance, ensures that each sentence has the power to stand on its own, and by the same token, it billows out into a millionfold of other texts. Like Oswald’s great anti-novel *Seraphim Grosse Pointe*, the manifesto is “a book that looked like an anthology of itself” (Campos 2007, 211). In its fragmentarity, the manifesto looks like the abstract of a long, baroque text. The manifesto is the cut-up of a much longer text that has not been written down but has instead been compressed into individual lines to the point of ultimate condensation, slashed to the point of aphorism: the text is its own summary, and as such it is open to infinite branching.

Furthermore, it is in this way that, as Rolando Pérez (2012) argues in his reading of Severo Sarduy's poetics, intensification through reduction is compatible with a neobaroque aesthetic.³³⁴ To ornament excessively and reduce minimally are similar strategies of the extreme: the (neo)baroque is not so much the art of excess as it is an art that shows there is nothing beyond, or 'deeper' than its asymptotic "artificialization" (Sarduy 2010, 272; Pérez 2012, 161). It is precisely this neobaroque tactic of intensive 'emptying' to the absolute minimum – so as to make room, literally 'by omission,' for the 'maximum' the reader is demanded to add – that Sarduy employs in his own poetic and fictional work.³³⁵ It is in a similar vein that Gilles Deleuze proposed what Constantin V. Boundas has called an "intensive reduction" (cf. Boundas 2009), which, in the field of the arts, consists in the production of "blocs of sensation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) from the work's materiality.³³⁶ As Darren Ambrose writes,

the arts must capture intensive forces ... as a 'bloc of sensations' which are transfigured and transcribed into the different materials associated with each of the specific fields. Specific fields of art, through their own specific material, have to create ... a consistent 'being of sensation' (Ambrose in Boundas 2009, 112).

Oswald works like Kafka, yet towards an opposite end. Whereas the Jewish German-Czech writer deterritorializes a worn-out German lyricism through "a purely intensive usage of language," whose vigorous poverty achieves "a perfect and unformed expression, a materially intense expression," Oswald creates phrase-monads that compress universes of (neo-colonial) legibility and visibility in an inversion of baroque excess. Against loquaciousness, Oswald's manifesto explores Sarduy's 'extreme' through

³³⁴ For a discussion of the baroque and the neobaroque, see the Introduction to Chapter 5 (5.1.2).

³³⁵ As Rolando Pérez notes, quoting from Severo Sarduy's *Obra Completa* (1999), "the excesses of the 'Baroque' ... , claims Sarduy, are the natural tendency of Spanish culture; while he, on the other hand, attempts to reduce his vocabulary to a bare minimum. 'He tratado de significar este universo con el mínimo de elementos: un vocabulario reducido, repetitivo, 'vaciado'" (1999, 1009). But this is not a turning away from the Baroque, as it may at first appear, for to ornament excessively and to reduce minimally the signs on a surface come down to the same thing: 'postular, otra vez, la literatura como artificio'" (1009) (Pérez 2012, 161).

³³⁶ As Deleuze and Guattari state in *What is Philosophy?*, "Art undoes the triple organization of perceptions, affections, and opinions in order to substitute a monument composed of percepts, affects, and blocs of sensations that take the place of language. The writer uses words, but by creating a syntax that makes them pass into sensation that makes the standard language stammer, tremble, cry, or even sing" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 178).

aphoristic minimalism. The manifesto is a page composed of word-monads and white spaces, effecting a Big Bang of dispersed, overdetermined meanings, which pass, through the very excess of possible, contradictory senses, into the sphere of a-semiosis and “baroque reasoning” (Buci-Glucksmann 1994) that thinks by means of the paroxysm of oxymorons.³³⁷ The manifesto is a virtual, infinite, neobaroque cathedral where a community of anthropophagists improvise and elaborate on the elliptic liner notes of Oswald’s manifesto, commemorating the originary swallowing of Bishop Sardinha in a grand tropical polyphony.

The Manifesto as Parable of Non-Identity

In following Haroldo de Campos’s and Severo Saduy’s leads, my image of the “Anthropophagite Manifesto” differs significantly from most canonical readings. The latter frame Oswald’s polemical exercise of plagiarism as if it were a parable of hybridity, understood in terms of a happy-go-lucky, pacifying melting pot mixture, as if the text were the incarnation - the example, the definite illustration - of an ideological conceit (those discourses with their metaphors of ‘melting pots’ and ‘cultural mosaics’) that has proven untenable, anachronistic, too idealist and marvellously real to be true.

I will start with Hector Olea’s rather depreciative tone in the essay “The Artist as Theoretician” (1994, 442-52), where he frames the text in terms of such a melting pot logic, while I believe the manifesto points in the opposite direction. Olea’s argument indirectly corroborates those canonical readings that divine a Hegelian-Marxian ‘impulse’ as the manifest’s core structuring principle, which is perhaps not surprising given some of the logical claims of the text, but which is highly illogical when actually reading the manifesto and tending to its sensory field. Olea seems intent on recuperating (‘salvaging’) the idea of *Aufhebung* in a text that explicitly pokes fun at it – Hector Olea’s usage of the term ‘sublation’ is therefore highly problematic. Oswald de

³³⁷ For more on Severo Sarduy’s thoughts on the relation of the Big Bang and the neobaroque in terms of dispersal, see “Big Bang,” in Chapter 4 (“La cosmologie après le Baroque”) of *Barroco* (1975, 143-147). I give a short sketch of Buci-Glucksmann’s notion of “baroque reason” in Chapter 5 (5.1.2).

Andrade's "Anthropophagite Manifesto," carves out a polemicist position - the cannibal, to reprise Campo's formulation, is a 'polemical anthologist' (cf. *supra*) - that neither accepts the *here* nor the *there*, or the clear-cut division between the South and the North. The manifesto stands in unyielding counterpoint to claims of belonging through its intransigent repudiation of capture by both the centre (the European *over there*) and the periphery (the South American *here*). I am referring to Octavio Paz's syncreticism and Alejo Carpentier's response. Paz (1982, 53) sees Latin American identity in terms of 'unification' based on eking out an accommodating that incorporates both periphery and centre. Or, as he terms it: "the Creole is like the Native American, from here, and like the Spaniard, from there." From this perspective, displacement is 'pinned down' as a combination (synthesis) of "the here and the there," namely the "ever-present reference to the European 'there' from which much of what shapes our societies comes, and the 'here' of a reality we have trouble defining" (Jiménez in Ramírez and Olea 2004, 247). In counterpoint, the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier upsets this inclusive "in-betweenness" through a negative 'edge' that acts as a self-conscious critical distancing of this syncretic impulse. Rather than inhabiting both a *here* and a *there* at the same time, Carpentier's simple negation, the "neither here nor there" (qtd. in *ibid.*, 247), foregrounds the contingency of cultural groundings, and the 'uninhabitability' of neatly separated ('falsely dialectical') cultural heritages. The discernibility between North and South, between 'over here,' and 'over there' is precisely what antropofagia puts in question.

The misrepresentation of the manifesto in terms of such a 'syncretic' gesture is premised on a specific reading of Oswald's proposed Carib Revolution. Ostensibly, this Revolution is posited as the end-point, the ultimate *telos* of all revolutions; it is the final revolution that will make all future revolutions superfluous. Cloaked in advertising rhetoric - 'better, faster, newer than the new!' - Oswald assures us that his revolution will be even "greater than the French Revolution" (Andrade 1991, 39). "We want the Carib Revolution. Greater than the French Revolution. The unification of all productive revolts for the progress of humanity" (*ibid.*). The Carib Revolution, as the culminating point of History, will incorporate the gains of the "French," "Bolshevik" and "Surrealist" revolutions and, promising the universal law of the anthropophagite, Man will finally come to realize himself. "From the French Revolution to Romanticism, to the Bolshevik

Revolution, to the Surrealist Revolution (...) We push onward" (ibid.). In this global reconciliation, the tension between community and singularity will be overcome. The end of history will be effected through the super-humanism of cannibalism. *Aufhebung*, with its characteristic movement involving preservation, negation and going beyond, will result in a 'true' and 'new' artistic praxis, after, as Olea notes, the "confrontation in which the ritual consumption of [European] Modernist flesh is intended to assimilate and incorporate all outstanding attributes," while "recombining parts in order to build new traditions or repair the status-quo inherited from colonialism" (Olea 2004, 447) – the latter constituting the 'going beyond.' Because the cannibal metaphor is an "organic" (ibid.) one, Oswald de Andrade's manifesto is supposedly stuck in an accommodating logic of assimilation, incorporation – the "concoction" or "stew" (Young 2001, 202) of 'transculturation.' Out of the simmering 'melting pot' the 'techno-cannibal' will rise according to the recipe of the "final dialectic of man," corresponding to three stages in history (Castro-Klarén 2000, 318 n26). The thesis of "natural man" will find its antithesis in "civilized man," with as synthesis "technified natural man" (ibid), "Keyserling's technicized barbarian" (Andrade 1986, 39) as the manifesto has it.

However, readings intent on recognizing such syntheses instantiated within a text fail to grasp the sensory field of the manifesto-poem; they read it as if it were a traditional, logical, philosophical exposition. Again, it must be stressed that the manifesto is not a 'fluent' text, and as such resembles dada and surrealist manifestoes, and as with most avant-garde manifestoes, 'conservation' is not its animating principle. Indeed, where does the text begin, where does it end – and to what end? Why is there so much white space between the lines? One can also wonder whether there is something even remotely resembling an 'argument,' apart from the short-circuiting of reasoning itself. In addition, the manifesto enacts a disharmonious accumulation of aphorisms, in an epigrammatic style that promises great revelation but whose deep truths remain enigmas. Buried under layers of erudition, one may even wonder whether the manifesto is not so much the simulation, the mimicry of a deep revelation rather than the divulging of a profound secret. The manifesto seems to have been purified from all baroque verbosity to the point that it becomes the surface for decipherment, producing a reader intent on unfolding the secrets the text seems to promise, and by doing so, gloss the text back into

baroque infinity.³³⁸ The lines of the text are themselves lines of flight leading out of the confines of the textual frame, requiring an encyclopaedic range of knowledge for their placement, for a minimal decoding. The density of the poem-manifesto heeds, in Haroldo de Campos's words, a "radical poetics" (cf. above), that cuts language in its tracks. Synthesis is of no concern here. Furthermore, it is not only the affective level – the 'syncopated' rhythm of the text – that ridicules any reading that takes the manifesto as an 'example' of a mood of sublation. The affective force of the text has its repercussions on the logical field of the text, giving rise to a chiasmic intertwining in which the one seems to contradict the other. Or rather, both are implicated within a play of forces and counter-forces, combining to the point of indiscernibility so as to tear the 'integrity' of the text apart: the text explores the logic of the affect, the affect of logic – the 'neologic' force of errors. Let us therefore attend to the contradictions.

A first 'crack' in the Hegelian edifice appears when conceiving the Cannibal Manifesto as an inversion, transvaluation – a parody – of Hegel's hierarchic organization in *The Philosophy of History*. In its gesture of privileging the peripheral 'here' over the European 'there,' the manifesto, in the words of Luis Madureira's *Cannibal Modernities*,

seeks to reverse, precisely in Hegelian terms, Hegel's apparently irreversible expunction of America's 'dull savages' from History. Against the Eurocentric civilizational itinerary which Hegel famously lays out in *The Philosophy of History*, *antropofagia* intimates that Europe's hegemony may not have been the result of its superiority of mind, but something of a historical accident (Madureira 2005, 14).

Unfortunately, Luís Madureira reterritorializes this interesting line of enquiry by insisting that anthropophagy ultimately "restores the offensive Hegelian smell" through its "project[ion] onto the world-historical stage the reconciliation between the Dionysian and

³³⁸ Most translations of the "Manifesto Antropófago" come with an explanatory apparatus that makes the manifesto dwarf in comparison. The glosses of the text respond, in their baroque expansiveness, to the enigmas posed by Oswald's neobaroque epigrammatic thought experiment. It is a response to the 'extreme' reduction that also marks Severo Sarduy's poetic work, as noted above in connection with Deleuze and Guattari's "blocs of sensation" (1994). For extensive glosses, see Leslie Bary's notes in Andrade 1991, 44-47 and Lorena Janeiro's annotations in Andrade and Rolnik 2011, 8-24.

Apollonian impulses” (ibid, 38).³³⁹ Sad but true, Madureira seems to imply, but the “Anthropophagite Manifesto” squanders its most radical revolutionary capital by subscribing, in the last instance, to an ethos of “radical humanism” (ibid., 36). Yet, is anthropophagy, “as a full-fledged philosophical concept (its final incarnation)” really “a figure for Hegel’s *Aufhebung*” (ibid.)? What is so problematic about Luís Madureira’s reading of the manifesto is that it hinges on Oswald late philosophical text, *A crise da filosofia messiânica* as the criterion, as the ‘final word’ on antropofagia as a whole. *A crise da filosofia messiânica* (The Crisis of Messianic Philosophy, 1950) was written as a doctoral dissertation presented in 1950 to secure a position as philosophy professor at the University of São Paulo (cf. ibid, 36). Although I agree with Madureira’s contention that this work constitutes a re-territorialization of Oswald’s anarchic thought through a strict Marxist-Leninist tabulation of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, “The Crisis of Messianic Philosophy” does not constitute a “final incarnation” of antropofagia. Oswald’s philosophical discourse - a work that was conceived expressly in terms of disciplinary adherence to academia - is but one moment in the overall revolutions of the antropofagia constellation. To read *A crise* as in some sense the ‘culmination’ of antropofagia is to already have reduced the movement and its heterogeneous corpus according to the demands and ‘lawfulness’ of a teleological narrative of predestination. Chronology is not an argument: chronology is that which grants the benefit and ‘spite’ of hindsight. Reading the manifesto according to the parameters set in *A crise* is a way not to read it at all: it is a way of avoiding the sensory field of the text, its recalcitrant silences, its dizzying superimpositions, its interruptions and the white spaces that confound any semblance of a ‘logical’ argument. Since there is no final word on antropofagia, antropofagia can never be regarded as a “full-fledged philosophical concept,” at least not in the traditional Kantian sense Madureira seems to imply. Antropofagia is hardly a determining concept that subsumes a multiplicity of intuitions through the operations of synthesis and schematization. Antropofagia does not heed the familiar narrative of abstraction as process, as the purification of the too particular into a modicum of

³³⁹ For a succinct discussion of the Nietzschean opposition between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, and how this dynamic is played out in constructive universalism, see Chapter 1 (1.1). For a very general account of the opposition between the two principles in Nietzsche’s aesthetic philosophy, see Braembussche 2009, 89ff. For an in-depth account of Nietzsche’s art philosophy, see Young 1992.

universality, of communicability and iterability.³⁴⁰ If anything, antropofagia is a name for the centrifugal work of words, of names, citations and images - their irrepressible movement out of the bounds of its genre. Antropofagia is not a “philosophical concept,” it is a quasi-concept involved in a non-philosophy, it is the effect of its constellation. Antropofagia is nothing but the inconstancy of the boundary between image and word, model and example, truth and ‘error.’ Instead of reading Oswald’s philosophical text as the ultimate formulation of the manifesto, one should read “The Crisis” against the grain of the manifesto. Perhaps such ‘synthesizing’ interpretations are from the outset driven by an imperative of constructing coherence where there is none, or rather, wherever coherence itself is foreclosed. Words, with ‘concepts’ amongst them, do not follow a logical trajectory, or, as de Andrade himself puts it, “we never permitted the birth of logic among us” (Andrade 1991, 39). The birth of logic in the manifesto is obstructed, never allowed to ‘grow up.’ The gaps in the text of the manifesto attest to a haphazardness interrupting the reading - its ‘accidentalism’ - as if we were engaged in a game of hopscotch, without ‘Heaven’ that is.

Against the indictment of the manifesto as a vehicle for ‘Southern’ Hegelianism, it should be read in the mode of deconstruction. As such, deconstruction does not specifically refer to a *modus significandi*, but colours the manifesto with a certain ontological ‘predisposition,’ as a way to address its *modus operandi*.³⁴¹ Anthropophagy, in terms of a cannibal poetics, is similar to deconstruction in its opposition to the Western logocentric tradition, or, to be more precise, in the unearthing of its fissures. As Haroldo de Campos (1986) sees it, deconstruction-anthropophagy is a global response – with its roots in Latin America and not Europe as canonical tradition would like to believe – to a “cultural heritage that is [becoming] ever more global” (Campos 1986, 55). In counterpoint to this hegemony, anthropophagite texts “speak the difference in the gaps of

³⁴⁰ In Chapter 5 (from 5.3 onwards), I focus on antropofagia’s unstable relation with regimes of legibility and visibility in the articulation of its own stance, and its convoluted routings with the colonial baroque in particular.

³⁴¹ For more on the distinction between *modus significandi* and *modus operandi*, which I base on Hubert Damisch’s (2009) account, see Chapter 2 (2.3). There, I show how the *modus operandi* of Torres-García’s work upsets the frame of constructive universalism’s theoretical claims.

a universal code” (ibid., 49). Apparently heeding the transvalorizing ‘logic’ of the “Anthrophagite Manifesto,” South America is positioned at the vanguard of this irreverent “deconstructive attack,” forcing the once-privileged Old World logocentrics to “prepare themselves for the increasingly urgent task of recognizing and re-devouring the differential marrow of the new barbarians of the polytopic and polyphonic planetary civilization” (ibid., 57).

Europe will now have to learn the deconstructive lessons of South America. The ‘counter-lineage’ of deconstruction-anthropophagy as an eminently Latin American practice, predates the European ‘strand.’ According to Campos, New World deconstruction already flowered in seventeenth and eighteenth century colonial baroque literature. Strangely enough – or perhaps not in the least if we read Campos’s text as an “attack” on a deconstruction that claims its ‘origin’ in a Western logocentric tradition – deconstruction as cannibalism is redefined in terms of a synthesis, but a militant synthesis involving a “chemical resynthesizing” of a European legacy “by means of an impetuous and unrestrainable metabolism of difference” (ibid., 54). Although this apparently re-introduces a Hegelian ‘odour,’ it is really a “counter-revolutionary attack” (ibid., 45) offsetting an unequivocal retracing of ‘origin’ by highlighting the irresolvable contradictions within its ‘foundational’ claims. The incommensurability between the *here* and the *there*, as producing the impossibility of the unambiguous ‘originary,’ is insistently put to work in Oswald’s manifesto.

The manifesto, as ‘artistic’ pamphlet – thus not situated immediately within the tradition of legalistic, moral, philosophical or politic discourse – does operate on a socio-political and historiographical level through invoking a revolutionary trajectory and by tackling Latin America’s confrontation with colonial (political, artistic, economic, etc.) legacies. Keeping in mind the ‘undecidability’ of *genre*, I will now briefly turn to the manifesto’s calling forth of its ‘law,’ the “world’s single law. Disguised expression of all individualism, of all collectivisms. Of all religions. Of all peace treaties” (Andrade 1991, 38). In the performative construction of its law, the manifesto must necessarily address its foundation, which, following Jacques Derrida, is ultimately non-justifiable or “mystical,” in that

the operation that amounts to founding, inaugurating, justifying law, to *making the law*, would consist of a *coup de force*, of a performative and therefore interpretative violence that in itself is neither just nor unjust and that no justice and no earlier and previously founding law, no pre-existing foundation, could, by definition, guarantee or contradict or invalidate. Discourse here meets its limit – in itself, in its very performative power. It is what I propose to call here the *mystical* (Derrida 2002, 241-42).

The founding of law is always accompanied by *violence*, “a concept that belongs to the symbolic order of law, politics and morals – of all forms of authority and authorization, of claim to authority, at least” (Derrida 2002, 265). The manifesto, in its pronouncement of the all-encompassing cannibal revolution is no exception – in fact, it pushes its “discursive limit,” its “performative power.” Judging from Oswald’s signature, the scene of ‘primal violence’ can be specifically ‘dated’. The inaugural moment of anthropophagite history – the zero point that can be deduced from “the 374th year after the swallowing of the Bishop of Sardinha” (Andrade 1991, 44) – would correspond to the year 1556 of the Christian calendar. The date, as mentioned before, refers to the first recorded ‘devoration’ of a Portuguese bishop, who was to embark on a mission of conversion, but who ended – counter-converted – in the belly of his cannibal ‘diocesans.’ The ‘anthropophagite calendar’ stages the practice of imposing a novel time keeping as index of a new ‘beginning,’ for a *tabula rasa* with respect to a tradition every revolution claims to supersede. However, the new chronology still relies on the canonical convention of a calendar structured in years, as the counting of 365-6 days, which is in turn based on the counting of twenty-four hours, and so on. This system, reliant on Western astronomy – and its links to navigation and Columbus’s historic miscalculation – and which is now a global hegemonic model, cannot be dissociated from the history of colonization, which Luis Bedit also demonstrates in the work *South-South*.³⁴² The new time – the time of the ‘beginning’ to reprise Silviano Santiago’s distinction – here leaps forward in a jump toward the future – the *Ursprung* – on the grounds of an ‘origin’ already in place.

³⁴² For a reading of Luis Bedit’s *South-South* and the pertinence of the concept of ‘constellation’ in addressing the word-image relation, see Chapter 4 (4.4).

The manifesto's first contradiction is heightened through Oswald's insistent call for an "undated world. Unrubrified. Without Napoleon. Without Caesar" (ibid., 41). Contradicting his own directive, the cannibal-revolutionary "Oswald de Andrade" proceeds to sign and date the text. The specific historicity of the 'founding' of the Carib Revolution is further negated by the modality of the call to revolutionary action. "We *want* the Carib Revolution," (ibid.; my emphasis) Oswald de Andrade proclaims, thereby suggesting that the defining event, the 'founding violence' of the Carib revolution is still to come, while being simultaneously brought into being by the performativity act of the manifesto.³⁴³ Indeed, *wanting* belongs to the subjunctive by pointing to a possible future; it denotes a wish, but a wish that, strangely enough, is fulfilled by the signature's feigning of the *fait accomplie* of the revolution. Consequently, the text continually re-performs its revolutionary call and as such keeps alive the *desire for* and *memory of* its promise, whose potential has nevertheless been unlocked, warranting its signing and dating. The specificity of the revolutionary founding must remain liminal and inconclusive, and this is what the manifesto hints at when stating, "we push onward" (Andrade 1986, 39). Moreover, "our independence has not yet been proclaimed" (ibid., 44). Overall, time is indeed profoundly *out of joint*. The tension between foretelling and recalling, refusal and avowal - "we were never catechized" (ibid. 39), *but still one is compelled to count years after the Western, Christian fashion, along the dictates of the Northern sky*) - enhances the "suspense" of the "future anterior present" of "all revolutionary discourses."

³⁴³ For an exhaustive treatment of the constitutive tension in the manifesto genre between theatricality and the desire to see its revolutionary, utopian premises actualized, see Martin Puchner's *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (2006). I refer to this tension and Puchner's work in Chapter 1 (1.3) as a way to address Torres-García's inscription within the parameters of the historical avant-garde and the contradiction Peter Bürger considers as its dialectical essence, i.e., between art's claim to autonomy and its desire to become part of the practice of everyday life at the same time. For an anthology of artistic manifestoes, with its usual focus on the canonical avant-gardes and North American Pop and post-Pop movements, see Mary Ann Caws's *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (2001). The 'Southern' manifesto is placed in the ghetto of "Part 12: Spanish, Catalan, and Latin American Avant-Gardes" (xii-xiii). The anthology reproduces Mário de Andrade's "Extremely Interesting Preface (excerpt)" (382-386) and frames it as representative of the entire Brazilian landscape of Modernist manifestoes. Mário's "Preface" is catalogued under 'Hallucinism.' Andrade's irony has been lost on the anthologist, since it did not so much constitute a movement but a parody on Europe's predilection for -isms, similar to his ironic plea addressed to Tarsiwald to found 'virginforestism.'

All revolutionary situations, all revolutionary discourses justify the recourse to violence by alleging the founding, in progress or to come, of a new law, of a new state. Those who say ‘our time,’ while thinking ‘our present’ in light of a future anterior present do not know very well, by definition, what they are saying. It is precisely in this nonknowledge that the eventness of the event consists, what one naively calls presence. [The violence of the revolutionary moment] interrupts the established law to found another. This moment of suspense, this founding or revolutionary moment of law is, in law, an instance of non-law. It is the moment in which the foundation of law remains suspended in the void or over the abyss, suspended by a pure performative act that would not have to answer to or before anyone (Derrida 2002, 269-70).

This perpetuation of suspense, the *hanging in* and *onto* the revolutionary moment through a performative intent on enacting something new already endowed with a pre-history, corresponds to the manifesto’s tactic of the “permanent contradiction” (Andrade 1986, 43). Every foundation is a promise, whose violence “calls for the repetition of itself and founds what ought to be preserved, preservable, promised to heritage and to tradition,” which results in the “differential contamination” between originary and preserving violence, as “preservation in its turn refounds, so that it can preserve what it claims to find” (Derrida 2002, 272). This contamination or oscillation is precisely what it is not merely at work, but also put ‘on display’ in Andrade’s “Anthropophagite Manifesto.” At stake is the problematic notion of inheritance, that ‘brand new tradition’ that both functions as an ‘impure’ foundation (as already a legacy rather than a new beginning *ex nihilo*) that cannot be overcome, while the manifesto simultaneously pledges that it can be surmounted, or at least such is the desire, the ‘want’ – Oswald is thus speaking in the ‘future anterior past/present,’ in the mode where ‘origin,’ ‘beginning’ and the leap into the future have become entangled in an overdetermined locus of enunciation. Oswald writes from a displaced, dislocated locus, - a dis-locus - a point in space-time continuously on the move, a kaleidoscopic dance of refractions.

Because of the mediation of the cannibal discourse through western tradition, Oswald’s cultural ‘foundation’ remains inaccessible as an esoteric rumour, whose hermeticism is exacerbated through a drawn-out logocentric discursive battle for the hegemonic representation of the ‘true’ cannibal. Speaking from *his* culture – the specific Western logocentric tradition ‘under deconstruction’ – Jacques Derrida mentions

‘carnivoracity,’ as well as “all other cannibalisms,” as a metaphor for the unifying ‘drive’ he wishes to dismantle,

Carnivorous sacrifice is essential to the structure of subjectivity, which is to say to the founding of the intentional subject as well and to the founding, if not of the law [*loi*], at least of right [*droit*], the difference between law and right [*la loi et le droit*], justice and right, justice and law [*loi*]. Along with the affinity between carnivorous sacrifice, at the basis of our culture and our law, and all the cannibalisms, symbolic or not, that structure intersubjectivity in nursing, love, mourning and, in truth, in all symbolic or linguistic appropriations (Derrida 2002, 247).

Here, the figure of the cannibal is appropriated by deconstructive discourse in order to justify its own undertaking. Comparing ‘logocentric’ cannibalism with Haroldo de Campos’s and ‘our’ reading of the “Anthropophagite Manifesto,” it seems that Oswald’s cannibal becomes a paradoxical figure of de-appropriation through re-appropriation in that it counters the voracity of Western culture with its own ravenousness. Against the deconstructive ‘bad,’ inner logocentric savage - the ‘cannibal’ deconstruction produces so as to give its own dismantling operation rhetorical force - Oswald poses antropofagia as always-already deconstructive from the start. Against Derrida’s rhetorical strategy that takes cannibalism as the incarnation of the foul odour of Hegelianism so deconstruction can set itself up as the ‘vegetarian’ antidote, Oswald shows the absurdity of such rhetorical reductions: the cannibal, the other within discourse, was always-already engaged in taking hegemony apart. Deconstruction just finds an easy metaphor in the cannibal, merely replicating its connotation of savagery, merely reproducing its abject exoticism to glorify its own self-image as counter-cannibal critique. Deconstruction is blind to the coloniality superimposed upon its own strategic metaphors: it wishes them to be unambiguous.

“But they who came were not crusaders. They were fugitives from a civilization that we are devouring,” the counter-conquest revolutionary (Andrade 1991, 41) proclaims defiantly. With this sentence, he negates the distribution of historical roles in that the quintessential victim now refuses to play his/her part within the writing of history, even refusing a contrite modern Western historiography that acknowledges its monstrosities. Through its adamant refusal to concede to the legacy of Christian spiritual domination, the manifesto laughs at the very possibility of transculturation as synthesis.

“We were never catechized,” Oswald de Andrade insists, “we made Christ be born in Bahia. Or in Belém do Pará” (ibid, 39), a Christ thus born and reborn in a never-ending cycle of comings (or ‘servings’ if you will) always to be devoured by a cannibalistic appetite – a process of unending becoming and incorporations, while, paradoxically, denying the reverent meanings coloniality attaches to this ‘intake,’ to this communion. Thus stepping out of the confines of logic, “we never permitted the birth of logic among us” (ibid.), Oswald de Andrade can now even claim victory in his counterintuitive reading of coloniality. Brazilian history started by a conversion, a reversal of roles: the first cannibal was a Christian bishop, passing his knowledge along the collective Tupi body. The discursive logic of the savage cannibal provided by ‘civilized’ Europe is taken up with sardonic relish in order to capture the colonizer in an exilic position by inverting the latter’s rhetorical contraptions. The manifesto’s impious appropriation and de-appropriation – while keeping in mind the past it ‘derives’ from – echoes the “critical view of History as a negative function” (Campos 1986, 44). Indeed, Antropofagia can be understood as “an attempt to give oneself, as it were *a posteriori*, a past in which one would like to originate in opposition to that in which one did originate” (Nietzsche 1997, 76). The figure of the anthropophagite, an *a posteriori* ‘origin,’ negates but is not ‘negationist,’ or rather, what it negates is the ‘chain of command’ of the scriptural economy of Western historiography. It frames the new origin through an inaugural digestion.

Antropofagia is the “absorption of the sacred enemy. To transform him into a totem” (Andrade 1991, 43). The notion of ‘enemy’ invokes the fundamental uncertainty - the “terror of the uncertain sign” in the words of Roland Barthes - of the word ‘host,’ the sacred body of Christ consumed in the Eucharist rite. The missionaries, in their endeavour to convert the Tupi to Catholicism, exploited the strange homology offered by the word *hostis*, in its dizzying, ‘Baroque’ conflation and superimposition of contrary meanings. *Host*, a homologous sedimentation of three etymological constellations, is the point of intersection, of confusion, between three distinct genealogies, harbouring the Latin *hospes* (‘host,’ or ‘guest,’ intimating hospitality), *hostis* (‘stranger’ or ‘enemy,’ intimating hostility) and *hostia* (‘victim’), with the latter intimating the ‘correct’ etymological root/route of host as the consecrated bread presencing the scared victim in

the moment of transubstantiation. As Frank Lestringant points out, the missionaries arriving in the New World to convert the anthropophagite native population sometimes instituted a *sensus analogicus* between *hostis* and *hostia*, effecting the condensation of the sacrificial cannibal victim with an enemy worthy - through his strength and defiant cannibal speech prior to his execution - to be devoured. As Lestringant writes,

the first missionaries of the New World were sometimes confusedly aware, by analogy with the Christian mysteries, of the similarity between this ritual anthropophagy and the sacrament of the Eucharist. Thus, Father José de Acosta used the word 'host' to refer to the victims of Aztec sacrifices, which, as is well known, were associated with anthropophagous practices. He was probably thinking of the etymology *hostia*, *quasi ab hoste* [Host, as if from *hostis*, enemy]. The victim was always taken from the enemy. In both Mexico and Brazil it was only prisoners of war who were sacrificed. It may well be thought, however, that the use of 'host' in such a context was not altogether innocent. To Acosta's Catholic readers the word would infallibly suggest the modern meaning: the Eucharistic bread, which became Christ's body at the celebration of the Mass (Lestringant 1997, 63).

The superposition of contradictory meanings points to indiscernibility, to an undecidability of legibility. It seems that the Christians were counter-converted, imbuing their own conception of transubstantiation with the 'unexpected bonus,' the critical infusion, the doubt of a surreptitious hybridity eating the integrity of the Word and its etymological 'rootedness' inside-out. Olea's characterization, already mentioned above, of antropofagia as the "ritual consumption of Modernist flesh," "intended to assimilate and incorporate and to recombine parts in order to build new traditions" (Olea in Ramírez and Olea 2004, 447) is not only problematic since it is predicated on the obscuring of Oswald's radical de-articulation of poetic good taste through epigrammatic rhythmicity. It equally presupposes a clear and distinct delineation between victim and enemy, between cannibal and 'cannibalee.' Olea omits the possibility of *doing* antropofagia (cf. Jarry) as patient, and is therefore blind to the manifesto's parodic chiasmic interweaving of 'North' into 'South' and back again. Stepping out of the confines of a binary logic, *antropofagia* lays claim to a victorious counter-conquest. The de-humanizing discursive logic of the savage cannibal provided by 'civilized' Europe is taken up with glee in order to reduce the colonizer to the position of sacrificial victim by hyperbolically agreeing with the contraptions of the rhetoric of coloniality.

A similar resistance to the traditional dialectic of master-slave in hegemonic discourse can be found in Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* (1983). In his controversial focus on the psychological damage inflicted on the British psyche through their colonial practice in India, Nandy deconstructs the clear-cut binary of oppressor/oppressed. In fact, "the ideology of colonialism produced a false sense of cultural homogeneity in Britain" (Nandy 1983, 32), thereby occluding the internal subalternization – along the vectors of class, race, and sexuality – within the hegemonic society itself as a recognition that these tensions might foster unforeseen allegiances between peripheral subaltern groups (the colony) and those marginalized groups within the centre. As Nandy points out, there is always reciprocal interaction, and in the case of the colonizing centre, there is always a backlash inflicting wounds and pathologies on the hegemonic mode (cf. *ibid.*, 32ff). In this case, the *hegemon* is subalternized, resulting in a proximity between positions that is perhaps too close for comfort. This fundamental undecidability is precisely what Oswald de Andrade's figure of the cannibal counter-revolutionary suggests.

As such, the figure of the 'cannibal' names a positionality, namely the polemical stance of the intransigent anthropophagite chronicler, spokesperson, and partisan of Carib counter-history. Oswald de Andrade, as 'witness' and apostle of the nocturnal, monstrous Carahiba Counter-Revolution speaking from his "place of reversal" (Derrida 1997, 27), erects a parallel timeframe – a parodic time – in which the revolution of the "year 374" is the 'foundation' from which to interrupt knowledge and re-vision history on his own terms: it is the locus of the *Ursprung*. My use of the term *parody* is derived from Mari Carmen Ramírez's understanding of the concept as implying "the creation of a counter-discourse or parallel canto" as it "sets up a critical parallelism" (18-19) as set out in the exhibition catalogue *Parallel Cantos* (1999). This understanding of parody in terms of *cantos paralelos* is based on a recuperation of the etymological 'routes' of the word. "In ancient Greek, *para* meant 'beside' or 'close to' and *ode* meant 'canto' or 'song'" (Ramírez 1999, 18). Marcelo E. Pacheco offers a similar approach to the concept as he holds that

parody always implies an ebb and flow, a rhythmic round trip: the crafting of a second text that retains, in its texture, embedded traces of an original text, an earlier version that becomes the model text (Pacheco in Ramírez 1999, 91).

It is precisely this interaction between parallel discourses through their superimposition - it is never a question of 'synthesis' - that generates a critical distancing that is "distinguished by an ironic inversion" (Hutcheon 1985, 6).

However, rather than reduce the play of parody between a 'model text' and its counter-version ('second text'), I propose a multiplication of 'models' which the marginalized stance reformulates in its own terms, thereby attaining what Walter D. Mignolo terms *gnosis* (2000). Parody, seen as the intersection of parallel constellations adapted and critiqued within a new 'text' rather than a purely formal procedure, does not necessarily presuppose the humorous, in the form of mockery or satire. "Tragedy frequently lies beneath parody" (Ramírez 1999, 19), and with respect to (recent) Latin American history, this is certainly the case. As a position operating within a space of risk, parody reprocesses the 'leftovers' of the hegemonic imagination and its colonial 'afterthoughts' – the literally unthought-of traumatic residue that risks upsetting a homogenizing and self-congratulatory Western discourse. Parody is therefore an epistemological tactic, producing an 'other knowledge' or, to use Mignolo's phrase, it brings about subaltern gnosis, or to borrow Guattari's and Deleuze's term, nomadology.³⁴⁴ Indeed, Parody is not a variation on a theme, or a one-way relationship between a canonical text and its 'vulgar' imitation, its inferior copy, or a semantic transposition, but an associative device that opens up a new area for thought. It is a device of analogy, the creation of *sensus analogicus*, the superimposition of visual analogies and resemblance with a productive, dispersive capacity; it is a knowledge-producing tactic (cf. Pacheco in Ramírez 1999, 93). This is a knowledge is of a different kind: it stands in counterpoint to an idea of knowledge as discursive cognition marked by logocentrism and its claims to universality. 'Border thinking' addresses the periphery-centre dynamics in all its complexities: the subaltern perspective not only interrogates the effects of the *hegemon* within its constellation, but it also foregrounds the inner tensions and contradictions between the Third and First World(s) at work within the periphery itself.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Nomadology: The War Machine* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986).

In spite of Mignolo's forceful advocating to the contrary, *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000) is still informed by a search for conceptual purity, which is quite a contradictory move in a book that uses terms such as creolism, transculturation, hybridity, and cultural phagocytosis as its main avatars. Strangely enough, rather than showing possible theoretical aporias or inconsistencies of both decolonizing deconstruction and nomadology, the argument of positionality is invoked in order to invalidate both theoretical practises as possible instances of 'an other thinking,' as the latter seems to be only possible from a subaltern lived experience in negotiation with the centre. Deleuze and Guattari are charged with developing a "nomadic universal history" (Mignolo 2000, 78), solely by virtue of their locus of enunciation – the privileged space of monolingual France – which would always already be complicit with the modernist/colonial paradigm. Furthermore, "it is one thing to deconstruct Western metaphysics while inhabiting it, and it is quite another to work on decolonization as a form of deconstruction from the historical exteriority of Western metaphysics" (ibid., 73). This begs the question of what would constitute such a 'historical exteriority,' and whether this – in our present day and age – is nothing more than a romanticized projection of an outside 'historically' untainted by Western metaphysics, which, to my mind, already points to the 'infection' of Mignolo's own discourse by colonial imaginings. Summing up, when positionality becomes the criterion of theoretical validity, then a thorough critical reading of the actual contents of conceptual formulations is mortgaged right from the outset. One may even ask the question whether, by virtue of its replication of the inside/outside binary, *Local Histories/Global Designs* itself adheres to what the author proposes, namely, 'an other thinking.' As the "Manifiesto Antropófago" shows, there is no clear and distinct boundary line which makes possible an unambiguous carving up of the world in subaltern and hegemonic positions. Oswald teaches Mignolo that the *idea* of border, as the tabulation of the world in clear and distinct loci of enunciations - as if a physical border were already proof of the local/global dichotomy - is a fantasy, a rhetorical construct that obscures the fundamental messiness, the irreducible chiasmic fabrications that interweave the position of the victim with that of the enemy, the cannibal and 'canibalee,' the agent and the patient.

I should define as baroque that style which deliberately exhausts (or tries to exhaust) all its possibilities and which borders on its own parody (Borges 1972, 11).

This is how Jorge Luis Borges formulates the baroque. If we take Borges at his word, then the manifesto is the baroquing of the baroque - antropofagia is ultra-baroque in that it presents the border itself as its own parody, as its own self-transgression, as the singing of two distinct songs at cross-purposes, to the point where the locus of the singer as well as the source of the song become indiscernible. The copy and the model, the example and the *eidos*, the parody and the parodied are superimposed to the degree that their 'border' no longer matters - what was 'first' is now the 'effect' of its 'imitation': this is the *retombée*, not synthesis. Oswald de Andrade's tactic of the "permanent contradiction" is a 'principle' for the production and dissemination of paradoxes and historic contradictions, but contradictions that do not serve a definite politics or logic, other than their dismantling, other than confounding an over-investment in the notion of the border, of the distinction between inside and outside, of a repressive 'vestimentary' logic: "What clashed with the truth was clothing, that raincoat placed between the inner and outer worlds. The reaction against the dressed man" (Andrade 1991, 38). And herein lies the manifesto's (minimal) utopian claim: to break open the perimeter between image and text, semblance and word, and heed Walter Benjamin's warning that "in every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it" (1968, 255). Antropofagia is that attempt.

Chapter 7

7 Reading the “Anthropophagite Manifesto” Anew: Emblematics, the Anti-Illustration and the Work of Adriana Varejão

7.1 Anthropophagite Emblematics: The Manifesto as Imagetext and the Baroque Hypothesis

The “Manifesto Antropófago” is a text filled with interruptions, with silences, with blank spaces that open up like a chasm between each line. The insistence of the white between the lines forces you to read between the lines. It brings the question of the visual in its relation to the word into the open. Sara Castro-Klarén uncovers the essential trait of the manifesto’s visibility when writing that “the gap between each aphorism marks the borderline of a trench that it digs before the next piece of text can arise. Each silence stands as a no-place between the unfinished, improperly sutured sides of the ‘now’ and ‘then’ of each statement” (Castro-Klarén 2000, 297). The metaphor of the trench - a metaphor that seems to follow the discursive logic of the historical avant-gardes with their military rhetoric - signals the point where an image rises up in-between the words; it is between the lines that the text turns into its other, into an image. The manifesto oscillates even more, superimposed with visual analogies, with regimes of visibility. It seems as if the lines of the text of the manifesto are ekphrastic gestures giving voice to the image’s resistance and ultimate indifference to precise signification – a resistance in the form of a monochrome, a minimal horizontal ‘zip’ in this case. In fact, Castro-Klarén formulates an eloquent reminder: the manifesto was not just a manifesto-poem. It was initially published in the format of an imagetext, a space where the words of the manifesto – as well as with the sparse horizontal lines ‘layering’ the text into textures – make room for an image, a drawing of Tarsila’s *Abaporu* (Figure 7.1). The manifesto is a hybrid, a *mestizo* imagetext, a composite work that juxtaposes the ‘advance formation’ of glottography with the space of risk traced by the drawing hand.

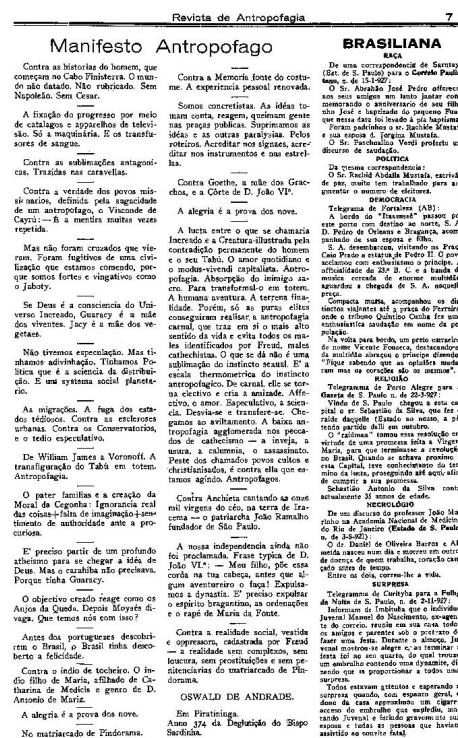
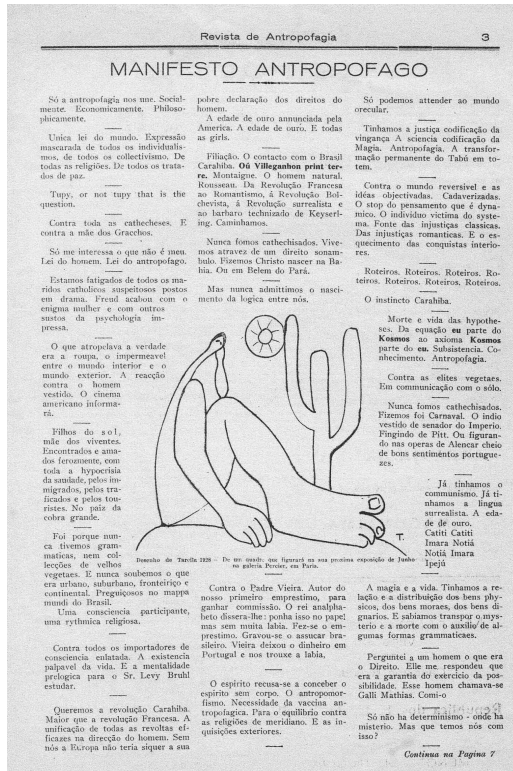


Figure 7.1 Left: Text of the “Manifesto Antropófago” by Oswald de Andrade with drawing by Tarsila do Amaral, “after a painting that will be displayed in her next exhibition in June at the exhibition of June in the Percier gallery in Paris,” i.e. *Abaporu*. From *Revista de Antropofagia*, no. 1, May 1928, page 3. Right: Text of the Manifesto, continued. From *Revista de Antropofagia*, no. 1, May 1928, page 7. [Facsimile, http://cdn.incinerrante.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/manifesto_antropofago_facsimile.jpg].

Antropofagia thus emerges – right here in the pages of the first issue of the *Revista de Antropofagia* (1928) – in counterpoint the idea of purity of the dividing line between the verbal and the visual, as well as semiotic readings that take the visual as if it were structured like a language, or at least structured like a certain model of image of language. To ‘read’ the manifesto one must look at the image; to view the image one must read the text: reading and looking enter into a chiasmic ‘relay’ (cf. Barthes), without clear conceptual ‘anchor’ holding the play of analogies together. *Abaporu* does not ‘illustrate’ the manifesto. The manifesto does not ‘describe’ *Abaporu*, and yet they are intertwined. Writing and drawing, glottography and manugraphics enter onto the same page so as to produce a sensory space, whose ‘resemblances’ and ‘reverberations’ depend on the contingency of the reading/viewing eye, busily experimenting with possible

regimes of legibility/visibility. The manifesto imagetext is a vignette of antropofagia, its calling card so to speak, showing how it works to disassemble – structuring and de-structuring. Antropofagia places both image and word in a proximity that deconstructs the thinking of clear and distinct borders while simultaneously insisting on the irreducibility of the word and image: it ‘exemplifies’ baroque ‘inconstancy’ (cf. Castro 2011). As such, the constellation of antropofagia – the superimposition of drawings, of manifestoes, paintings, history, banquet scenes, the colonial baroque sites of rediscovery – is a baroque ‘demonstration,’ a virtuoso demonstration of the ultra-baroque. The drawing *Abaporu*, the site of the ‘monstrous,’ space of risk and uncertainty ‘gestured’ in the chance movement of the hand, intensifies the instability of an already radical, epigrammatic poetics, as conveyed through Oswald’s writing. *Abaporu* draws itself into an anomalous text, heightening the latter’s enigmatic message, while being circumscribed and drawn apart by the manifesto’s strange refusal to communicate clearly what it intends. Roberto González Echevarría’s observations in *Celestina’s Brood* (1993) on the enigma posed by the figure of the monster in Calderonian drama, can be re-read as the textual embodiment of radical epistemic uncertainty characteristic of the New World baroque, where the name ‘monster’ indicates the radical heterogeneity of the visible: it names a moment of interruption between visibility and legibilities, the instance where the stable regime of intelligibility breaks down.³⁴⁵ It is a space of visual “thickness” (Lyotard 2011),³⁴⁶ a baroque ‘interlude’ *par excellence* where classical “nomenclature” (cf. Foucault 1970) must rush in to find or create the proper name to exorcize the formless, and make it visible in a determinate way (and thus subsumable, generalizable). González Echevarría of monster “the monster is essentially a visual entity: monster, ‘monstrar’ (to show), demonstrate” (González Echevarría 1993, 157).

³⁴⁵ In Chapter 5 (5.2.4), I discuss the birth of the cannibal as the registration of a radical break in the regimes of legibility/visibility occasioned by the discovery of the New World, and the epistemic conundrum it posed to classical episteme with its drive for taxonomy and the encyclopedic tabulation of the visible – as the age of “nomenclature” (cf. Foucault 1970, 226-249). As I show in my reading of González Echevarría’s ‘monster’ – which I consider a metaphor for the break in visibility – the monster is what ‘demonstrates’ this discontinuity, and the cannibal is the most eloquent display of the unintelligible.

³⁴⁶ On Lyotard’s notion of the opacity (*l’épaisseur*) of the visual, sensory field, and the way it inhabits language, see my discussion in Chapter 2 (2.3).

Abaporu's monstrosity – its resistance to clear signification, to a decoding in terms of *grafismo*, its intractable visuality and hyper-iconicity³⁴⁷ – folds back into Oswald's text, making antropofagia into a meditation on the contingency of our ideas of writing and imaging, of how words make sense through images, and how images borrow meaning from words. The imagetext stages this instability by refusing to give up how the relation between its word and its image is to be 'read.' Moreover, the 'Tarsiwald' interface 'demonstrates' a loosening, a devouring, of the boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical, the illusionistic and the allegorical, the symbol and the icon. In other words, it is a way of posing the question of where words end and images begin. Indeed, "what we see never resides in what we say" (Foucault 1970, 10).

What is required is to think the question posed by the imagetext in its baroque overflowing as an emblematics. In considering the 'unstable' genre of the emblem book - a medium that was most popular in Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth century - Jon Whitman addresses the irreducibility of the image to the word (and vice versa), and how this imagetext praxis renewed "the ancient question of how visual figures relate to verbal ones (...) with the expansive composition of books in which elaborate forms of *pictura* and *scriptura* gloss one another" (Whitman 2000, 276). The emblem book puts the usual disciplinary distinction between description and illustration under pressure, intimating a much more complex dynamic attesting to the "the emblem's interpretive flexibility. In many cases, for example, the picture does not merely 'illustrate' the text and vice versa; rather, each elucidates and at times qualifies the other. An image with an inherited meaning may be significantly realigned by its new textual setting" (ibid., 276-277). The emblem is suggestive of the interminable interaction between word and image and their ever-shifting, dialogical permutations. An emblematic approach, i.e., a perspective that takes the mutual complicity of discourse and image as its point of departure, would, in the words of Michel Foucault, take serious the claim that "the relation of language to painting is an infinite one" (Foucault 1970, 10). I therefore propose 'emblematics' as a mode of reading that sees itself as a mode of ekphrasis, as the

³⁴⁷ As I have tried to show in Chapter 5 (5.2.1), *Abaporu* is the superposition of so many other images, and is an item in a set of infinite (neobaroque) visual-verbal recombinations.

recognition of the work of the visible in the legible, and the legible in the visible. This in fact has been my '*modus operandi*' all along - it seems that only now a 'name' has developed, through readings and viewings, for this quasi-method informed by a re-reading of constructive universalism and antropofagia. It is a mode - a 'mood,' perhaps, exploring the imaginary afforded by the subjunctive - of reading that implicates viewing, and in this particular case antropofagia proves paradigmatic: it is a constellation of visual and verbal sites that interpenetrate, a corpus of poetry, literature, painting, sculpture, music and other media, constituting a grand emblem book as it were. The texts and images invite a reading that takes heed of the relation of image to text, but a relation not conceived in terms of subsumability, of placing the one under the rule of the other. Emblematics-antropofagia keeps the logic of the example, the logic of illustration, at bay. Furthermore, what antropofagia interrogates is precisely the inconstancy of the boundary between text and image. The images produced under its sign move away from their capture as 'illustrations' of a text, be it a historical period, a specific style that can be inserted within an art historical narrative, and so forth. This is not to deny their historic specificity, quite the contrary. Historical discourse must do its work: it is superimposed onto the image itself. Rather, it is a way of opening up discourse, of a *modus operandi* that would allow seeing the image again, in a new light, to make the familiar a site of re-discovery, much in the same way that Barroco Mineiro could appear as transgressive at one specific moment in time, a subversiveness that is now hard to re-imagine, to make legible again.

An emblematics is precisely what Foucault's discourse enacts. Writing of *Las Meninas* – the site that registers the impending shift from the Classical to the modern episteme – Michel Foucault broaches the relation of language to the visual. The proper name, as the paradigm of the 'will' to classify and tabulate purports to be able to 'solve' the enigma of the visual, a problem language is too quick to pose in terms of epistemology. A correct identification through language would ensure the 'truth' of the painting. Traditional accounts have busied themselves in providing the proper name for the figures (King Philip IV, Mariana, Doña Maria Agustina Sarmiente, Nieto, Nicolaso Pertusato), while others have integrated the painting within biographical accounts of Velázquez, style periods, historical expositions, technique and other instances where

language has come to the aid in transforming the visual into a sign within a global (that is to say, Eurocentric) history (of art).³⁴⁸ The notion that the painting poses a ‘riddle,’ i.e., a detective novel whose denouement would consist in the correct labelling of who is reflected in the mirror (the culprit of all this epistemic labour) – bypasses the visual by converting it into a logical field: it is a willed blindness to the painting as a space where visibility takes shape. An image is not a text whose code still awaits breaking through names that are ‘proper’ to it. In the face of this painting, eye to eye with the mirror, language is forced to relinquish its grasp over things and must allow the work of displacement of *Las Meninas*. Through Foucault’s evocative writing, the painting becomes visible as the emblem of the shift from the classical to the modern episteme, a shift language overcompensates through overdetermination, by naming too many names, by trying too hard to ‘solve’ a painting that will remain enigmatic in that it is not grounded in myth or Biblical narrative. Its meaning is undecidable; it cannot be adjudicated - and surely not by discourse alone.

In order to truly ‘see,’ language must give up the grandeur of its proper names, of correct identification – the index finger of a victorious designation and appropriation. The painting as the space of the visual, of the sensory field which language cannot take hold of can only be reconstituted by the “medium of this grey anonymous language” that does justice to the infinity of the relation, and make the ineffability of the image somehow

³⁴⁸ The amount of literature on *Las Meninas* is vast. A recent issue of *The Art Bulletin* featured a reading of the image in terms of the colonial objects it depicted, as a way to displace disciplinary boundaries and reconsider the image from the perspective of colonial and transatlantic studies. The “red ceramic vessel,” “the silver tray,” and the “read curtain” “signal products of the New World, products of the labor of Amerindian subjects of the Crown” (Hamann 2010, 7). Hamann’s ‘materialist interpretation,’ painstakingly retracing the provenance of the objects in Velazquez’ painting, is intended to “unearth the unseen conditions of possibility that made this scene, and much of the splendor of the seventeenth-century Madrid court, possible: the labor and economic value extracted from New World possessions” (ibid., 29). A consideration of these objects would prompt a reviewing of the entire cultural production in Europe during the baroque as essentially transatlantic. The essay generated a number of highly critical responses, all part of the same issue of *The Art Bulletin*, by Adam Herring (2010, 36-40), Walter D. Mignolo (2010, 40-47), Felipe Pereda (2010, 47-52), Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt (2010, 52-53), Emily Umberger and Francesca Bavuso (2010, 54-57), as well as a response to the critiques by the author (Hamann 2010, 58-60). Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt has edited a critical anthology of essays dealing with the response and ‘afterlife’ of the painting in art history and theory, as well as its appropriations in modern and contemporary art (cf. Stratton-Pruitt 2002). I will restrict myself to listing some of the more notable readings of *Las Meninas* and the oeuvre of Velazquez. Cf. Ortega y Gasset 1972, Searle 1980, Snyder and Cohen 1980, Steinberg 1981, Snyder 1985, Alpers 2005, Carr and Bray 2006.

legible, audible. The most truthful ekphrasis is the kind that relinquishes identification and gives form to the *modus operandi*, thereby tearing it from the demands and tabulations of the linguistic grid. It would also extract the painting from the illusion of restitution, i.e., that painting is somehow ‘natural,’ and that viewing is just a matter of reanimating the painted figures, as if there were no artifice – no code or discourse – involved to make such illusionism intelligible.

These proper names would form useful landmarks and avoid ambiguous designations (...). But the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other’s terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax. (...) [I]f one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting-point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided, so as to stay as close as possible to both, then one must erase those proper names and preserve the infinity of the task. It is perhaps through the medium of this grey, anonymous language, always over-meticulous and repetitive because too broad, that the painting may, little by little, release its illuminations. We must therefore pretend not to know who is to be reflected in the depths of that mirror, and interrogate that reflection in its own terms (Foucault 1970, 10).

The incompatibility of language – “the space where one speaks” - with the image – “the space where one looks,” or, to use Lyotard’s distinction, the irreducibility of the logical field and the sensory, visual field, is what this ‘grey language’ would testify to.³⁴⁹ In effect, this anonymous writing allows the “the painting [to] little by little, release its illuminations,” a nameless discourse that makes the image shine forth in all its splendour making its colours, contours, forms, lines, and marks stand out all the more: it is an ekphrastic operation that co-creates the images in a play of chiaroscuro between the grey of the word and the light of the image, thus giving the image its depth of field. The *umbra* of the word gives the *lumen* of the painting its *splendor*, its full visual effect, the ineffable shimmering of things in the painting that grants the image its irrefutable

³⁴⁹ For more on the notion of “sensory field,” see the General Introduction as well as Chapter 1 (1.1 and 1.2). In Chapter 2, There I relate Lyotard’s concept to Torres-García’s discourse of purity on *grafismo*, which attempts (and fails) to negate the sensory field altogether.

haecceity. In fact, through its subtle invocation of lux, umbra and splendor, Foucault's own language could be made visible as an ekphrasis of the displacement of the classical, Renaissance theory of painting, which he frames as symptomatic of the decentering of the subject's solidity through a baroque, specular *mise en abîme*. Splendor then becomes the name for this baroque uncertainty principle.³⁵⁰ As James Elkins observes in his critique of the closed economy of Gombrich's deterministic, structuralist account of the classical theory and the seemingly transparent tabulation of its three concepts, splendor is the term that makes the clear distribution between the conceptual trinity uncertain. Splendor is the most elusive term since it only works through the differential between lux and umbra, with both able to convert into their opposites depending on their relative position, becoming lighter or darker with respect to what 'constant' is chosen as situational criterion. Furthermore, splendor is the most difficult to describe since it concerns the sensory field itself, in its full aesthesis, constituting the 'rhetoric' of the image, which is lost by circumscription or its decoding within a rigid hierarchy – a veritable *grafismo* – such as Gombrich's. In short, the term 'splendor' evokes a non-semiotic element in a visual composition - it can only evoke since it attempts to describe something that can only be seen, that pertains to the 'space of sight' only.

The three terms [lumen, umbra and splendor] become relative comparative adjectives, and one term can be displaced in favor of the others: a brighter splendor can turn a duller one into a mere lumen, and so forth. Splendor is meaningless or indeterminate by itself: against a dark ground it becomes ambiguously lumen or splendor; against a lighter ground it becomes umbra. For its part, umbra might even function as splendor if its surrounding fields are in darker shades. Even lumen cannot stand on its own, because in order to be perceived as 'light' it needs to contrast with a previous mark or surface that would then become umbra (Elkins 1995, 855).

Foucault's 'grey language' would renounce its role as anchoring mechanism. It would be a language allowing for a loosening of its ideological grip over the surface of the picture: it would refrain from speaking the name of the reflection in the mirror, but would let the reflection do its own work, visually. By allowing the force of the painting's aesthesis

³⁵⁰ In Chapter 4 (4.4), I follow James Elkins's text, in which the lux, umbra, splendor distinction is deconstructed through the loaded brush technique, as a means to think the 'baroque,' hybrid conception of Inca astronomy.

shine through, it would also put the position of the subject - as centripetal point of synthesis - in question. The grey of language serves to foreground the Baroque interrogation of a centered world picture. The manifesto imagetext, produced by the verbal-visual hybrid Tarsiwald, evinces a similar effect of destabilization through the “productive - *barrueca* - anomaly of American elements, in the variegated and multilayered mixture of language or imagery” (Moraña 2005, 266), a vertiginous Neobaroque superposition that compresses “systems of codification,” in an “articulation of several divergent temporalities, cultures, and representational means” allowing the image to ‘demonstrate,’ to “concretize—materialize—the constitutive hybridity of the colonial and (neo)(post)colonial subjectivity” (ibid., 265).

Antropofagia thus also poses the question of where the self begins, words end and images take over. Its imagetexts pose the enigma of indeterminacy: at which point in this relay does the ‘self’ take on consistency? Is it not continuously in the making, torn apart and devoured by acts of perception, by images as well as words, only to be reconstituted and patched backed together as the situation demands? What antropofagia suggests is that there is no point of separation between word and image, or that this separation is more like a figure of speech, a condition of figurability allowing for words and images. There is no focal point enabling us to distinguish words from images in any absolute way, but the imagining of such demarcations is what allows us to speak about images and words and be invested in their production and reflection. Sometimes differences are reified and given ontological status: Lessing’s rigid distinction between the so-called spatial arts – painting, architecture and sculpture – and temporal arts – drama, film, literature and music – is one such distinction that has generated a tradition of thought, one that helped to articulate the disciplinary division between the study of words and the study of images, as well as so-called comparative approaches. Antropofagia is therefore not synonymous with synaesthesia, at least not in the sense that presupposes a division of the Sensorium into clear and distinct sensory faculties, and the construction of ‘media specificity’ grounded in such a division, only to be synthesized back into a whole, into some kind of ideal unity – the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Interestingly, in the same discussion of the emblem already mentioned, Jon Whitman suggests a connection between the emergence of European Modernity, in which old regimes of visibility of legibility were dethroned by empiricism and Cartesianism and the development and popularity of this new medium, a medium in step with the development of Baroque culture and the sphere of subjectivity. As opposed to the increasing rigour of science and ‘objectivity,’

in the very period in which both human art and science seem increasingly capable of offering 'objective' observations of the world, intriguing compositions like the emblem dramatize the 'subjective' dimension of that world, its 'clarification' and construction by the human mind. (...) Emblematic writing at large - artfully shaping significance by the variable interplay between picture and text, and meticulously depicting objects while expressively manipulating them - finally suggests not only the invention of a new 'language,' but also the articulation of a new world (Whitman 2000, 278-79).

This seems to suggest that the mixed medium of the emblem somehow functioned as a repository for the subjective, as a space for the ‘modulation’ of the increasingly strict rigour of objectivity, as a counter-image to the stern, modern world picture in the making, as a refuge where object and subject, image and word had not yet been fully dirempted. It seems to be already in tune with a Baroque sensibility, a sensibility that would extend its critique in a New World ultrabaroque. To put things differently, the emblem is a baroque counter-space re-entangling the noumenal with the phenomenal, object and subject. As such, it constitutes a heterotopia for thought, a space of play, of indulgence, of baroque *luxuria* against Protestant aniconism. However, what is even more intriguing is Whitman’s slip of coloniality, the mention of the ‘new world,’ the New World, the *terra incognita*, which would be incorporated into the scriptural-pictorial economy of the Old World into a global, coordinate world system while at the same time developing a clandestine counter-conquest through the American baroque. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, this discovery of the ‘unknown’ - the perception of the other as an epistemological problem, of a problem of correct decoding, this other who would be disciplined soon enough into his/her proper place within a classificatory encoding - prompted a coming to terms (a ‘disregard,’ to put it mildly) with regimes of visibility and legibility foreign to one’s own, but which would ultimately be aligned onto a plane of

equivalence, that is to say, into the suppression of visibilities/legibilities - with the Inca as most poignant case - into the dictates of glottography and the canons of figuration. At the same time however, this regulation of space-time was countered by a cultural subversion working inside-out – in Lezama Lima’s Baroque Counter-conquest – with Kondori and Aleijadinho already experimenting with their mestizo, transgressive superpositions of the pre-Columbian and forms imported from the ‘North’ into the making of monuments to a ‘monstrous’ counter-revolution.³⁵¹

Antropofagia is a mode of articulation predicated on accumulation as a manifestation of the gluttony and self-perpetuation through the cosmic appetite of what Haroldo de Campos has called “cannibal reason” (cf. Campos 1986; 2007) – that is to say, a reason intent on combining and recombining words and images into an obstinately polysemous *mestizaje* exploiting the ‘terror of the uncertain sign’ (Barthes), mobilizing the counter-terror of a-semiosis against the discipline of classical, aniconic tabulations. In short, antropofagia, conceived of as an essentially emblematic constellation, poses the question of interpretation, and shows that encoding and decoding “involves more than the internal relation between *pictura* and *scriptum*. It implies the question of interpretive perspectives toward phenomena at large” (Whitman 2000, 278). The emblem, in the guise of Tarsiwald’s manifesto imagetext, is an exercise in the gymnastics of contradiction, a repository of conflicting interpretative positions with “multiple, sometimes conflicting frames of reference” (ibid.). Antropofagia, as polemical emblem-constellation, mobilizes “the fundamental question of the conditions under which meaning itself is instituted” (ibid.). More radically, it operates on the contingency of regimes of legibility and visibility, bringing a-semiosis into view through a mobile choreography of word and images.

³⁵¹ It would be interesting to gauge whether some of the logics of visibility/legibility of the South ‘transmuted’ into the late European Renaissance and Baroque medium of the emblem, and how ‘Southern’ legibilities/visibilities of the Baroque ‘counter-conquest’ inflected the medium of the emblem book, and more generally speaking, the distribution of words and images in their signifying potential. This would be to pose the question of coloniality with respect to European interfaces of words and images, with coloniality, to borrow Walter Mignolo’s phrase, “quite simply, the reverse and unavoidable side of modernity - its darker side, like the part of the moon we do not see when we observe it from earth” (2000, 22).

Strictly speaking of course, the art of the antropofagia movement does not consist of any ‘emblem books’ in the historically determinate sense. What I am proposing however is to use the concept of the emblem as a tactic of exploring the multifaceted phenomenon gathered under the heading antropofagia. This tactic allows for the articulation of tensions that antropofagia explores in its constant interrogation of borders: the boundary between text and image, self and other, colonial and pre-colonial, ‘over here’ and ‘over there,’ future and past, as well as the division of cultural production in genres and media. Antropofagia is a reflexive staging of the encounter of visibilities/legibilities, thus shedding a little light on the dark side of the moon, as an after-image in the reflected light of coloniality. Or, through its characteristic inconstancy of temporality, one might as well call it the ‘before-image:’ through its appropriation of means of representation inherited from colonial times shot through with the memory of the pre-colonial, antropofagia opens up a vista on a mythical time, a duration, ‘before’ the separation of word and image, ‘before’ the moment of signification and naming, and superimposes the one onto the other, the negative of the moon onto the light of the sun. As *modus operandi* then, antropofagia loosens up the grip of the eye, making the language of sight reverberate with the language of hearing and marking (and vice versa) into an indiscernibility of aesthesis beyond clear conceptual distinctions. At the same time however, this glimpse, this utopian potential can only be momentary, and more devastating perhaps is that this ‘glimpse’ is a retrospective construct, a moment in a narrative economy – it is the glimpse made possible by artifice, by an eye already attuned to certain possibilities of seeing (while necessarily blind to other possibilities) through actual regimes of legibility. Antropofagia intimates a time ‘before’ the codification of the ‘New World,’ allowing a glimpse of the ‘inconstancy of the Indian soul’ (cf. Castro), by making inconstancy itself its animating principle. At the same time however, antropofagia exposes this utopian desire for a time prior to the word/image separation as already complicit with in the inscriptions and imaginings it wishes to break free from: the ‘primitive’ as the primordial unity of word and image is itself nothing but a rhetorical construct, a most ‘erudite’ fiction for the dismantling of erudition. Never does antropofagia fall into the trap of the aestheticization of regression, in contrast to the

theories of constructive universalism and Torres-García's simulated, modernist shamanism (cf. Part 1).

Above all, antropofagia is polemical, it is political. The moment of indiscernibility, as the de-territorialization of concepts and boundaries, is followed by an intransigent recoding, an interpretative demand. As I have tried to demonstrate with *Abaporu*, a painting is never 'just' a painting, and in the specific case of visual artworks that were made under the 'protectorate' of antropofagia, they must always be read alongside poems, stories, manifestoes, other paintings, etc. It are the words that charge the images with the force of contestation, while images colour the words with ambiguity, making them speak in different tongues; the words refuse the ekphrastic ideal of Foucault's "grey anonymous language," while the image counts only in the light of the sayable. Its calling does not lie in the agreeable, in the beauty of *le mot juste*: antropofagia is self-dissensus, self-contradiction, a corrosive-utopian negativity costumed as Brazilian carnival organized around intensive signifiers. This decoupling of what the eye sees and the revelation of the invisible, but writeable 'truth' is the principle of inconstancy itself, legible as parody. As Oswald writes, summing up this *modus operandi*, "we were never catechized. What we really made was Carnival. The Indian dressed as senator of the Empire. Making believe he's Pitt. Or performing in Alencar's operas, full of worthy Portuguese sentiments" (Andrade 1991, 40). Conversion was merely the pretext, the necessary condition for the experience of the joy of the transvestism of carnival, this privileged site for the inversion of power. The visual, Baroque opulence of carnival means the opposite of what it is taken to be. The truth resides in pleasure, i.e., joy at the prospect of the killing and incorporation of the scared enemy, Christ, a few weeks later. Conversion is but the disguised continuation of the Tupinambá vengeance rite.

This is what I would like to call the 'baroque hypothesis' of antropofagia, of its emblematics: it is the positing of indiscernibility itself for the sake of generating incessant decodings and re-codings through polemical regimes of legibility and additional, superimposed visibilities. It is a monstrous demonstration: an un-showing through superposition, a visual-verbal deconstruction disclosing that the 'new' – the New

World, avant-garde art, and all other names for ‘breaks’ – emerges in the reconfiguration of artifice, an artifice now charged with the power to contest.

In the Tarsiwald imagetext, *Abaporu* is the drawing of the hypothesis, of a figure of thought to which the manifesto responds, and vice versa. They stand in a chiasmic relation, that is to say, in a diagrammatic tension of thinking the one through the other. The relation between text and image within this diagrammatic constellation (cf. Chapter 4), is such that the image is productive, and helps shape the hypothesis itself, and does not stand in any subservient relation to discourse. Anthony Auerbach, commenting on the intimate nexus between drawing and argumentation in the tradition of the Euclidean geometrical demonstration, calls attention to the dynamic between image and text and the former’s active role in the shaping of thought, in that a hypothesis is as much a matter of drawing as it is of discourse and formulas (cf. Auerbach 2011, 66-76). He dubs his approach ‘pragmatic’ in that it reads graphs and diagrams as thought-figures co-produced in complex relays of discourse and mathematical formulas. This pragmatism is what corresponds to my reading of Brazilian ‘baroque modernism’ in terms of a diagrammatic emblematics,

because it is concerned with the meanings produced, transferred and transmitted by the *use* of diagrams: content not reducible to the abstractions in which diagrams purport to deal, nor necessarily derivable from the hypotheses on which the diagrams rest, more or less explicitly, more or less consistently. The metaphorical economy of diagrams is a web of exchange in which drawings function not only as tokens but as agents (Auerbach 2011, 66-68; emphasis in original).

Antropofagia’s baroque hypothesis is the thinking of the figure of thought of inconstancy: its hypothesis is the ‘*de-monstration*’ of inconstancy at work, through a writing that thinks the line of the risk of drawing, and a visuality that transposes the contingency of the movement of the tracing hand back into the text, continuously making and unmaking – through our act of reading and viewing – a mestizo hyper-icon/hyper-text. In this dynamic intertwining, the hypothesis disarticulates the logic of the example, the logic of the illustration, the logic of a classical thought of tabulation so as to superimpose its own excess into a constellation of contestation, in which the ecstasy of plagiarism, of allomorphism – the baroquing of the baroque – effects a polemical

disequilibrium. “The only things that interest me are those that are not mine. Law of man. Law of the anthropophagite” (Andrade 1998, 536) is how the “Anthropophagite Manifesto” formulates this ‘law’ of plagiarism, of always being outside of one’s own ‘proper’ place. “What hindered truth was clothing, the impermeable element between the interior world and the exterior world” (ibid.) Antropofagia is the superposition of the interior over the exterior and back again, exploring their ‘dissolve;’ it is an experiment in *parergon*. Antropofagia is the art of vertigo whose “content” is a ‘dis-content,’ a spacing between word and image, a “metaphorical economy” (Auerbach 2011, 68) – the trafficking in images in their widest sense – so as to explore the possibilities of the sensory field opened up between the two and make them resistant to capture. It can be no more than a hypothesis since it always invites its own refutation through future superimpositions.

In his reading of Jacques Derrida’s *The Post Card* (1987) and *Glas* (1990), Gregory Ulmer points to the ‘agentive’ role of the figure of thought as opposed to its imagining as passive illustration (cf. Ulmer 1985, esp. 98-124). Through deconstruction, the ‘truth’ of the example is uncovered as against the fantasy of the closed circuit of signification, a tautological relation between model and example that a classical, marble image of thought – with the semiotic model of signifier/signified and its many derivations – upholds. The hegemonic conceptualization of the example, i.e., the ‘logic of the example’ as opposed to the sensory field it is implicated in, amounts to a disciplining of the illustration as the patient, as an element framed as *explanans* in the set delineated by a discursive *explanandum*: what the example is ‘permitted’ to explain is determined in advance by the architecture of the text, which presents one specific trait of the example as pertinent, while all others are deemed ‘redundant’ to the explanatory set-up. However, considered in its *modus operandi*, the trait singled out by the model in the restricted economy of exemplification always runs out of bounds, since the example will always carry other, unwanted traces along with it, undermining the stability of the model. It is this unthought-of remainder, it is this sensory field, that deconstruction mobilizes in its tactic of reading. The work of the example/illustration – its *parergon* – superimposes upon the model regimes of visibility and legibility that are not properly its ‘own.’ The example always comes with a pre-history, a palimpsestuality the model must, of

necessity, silence. The hypericonicity, the hypertextuality that cannot be subsumed under its conceptual distributions must not be allowed to interfere with the syllogistic operations of discourse. The logical field must be maintained through a regulation of the sensory field – that is to say, through the simulation of their identity. However, the sensory field is never reducible to the logical claims of its own discourse: the sensory field always makes a ‘return.’ As I have shown in Part 1 (Chapter 2, 2.2), one name for this silencing is *grafismo*, while one name for the return of aesthetics is ‘graphism’ (Chapter 2, 2.3).

On Ulmer’s reading then, deconstruction uncovers the example’s clandestine centrality, thus contradicting its usual narrative framing as expendable. Charged with the power of the ‘supplement,’ the example is shown not so much to ‘instantiate’ the model, but instead to covertly deconstruct the latter’s projected integrity through the ‘frames’ of reference it brings with it, the past citations, the history of other models it has been used to corroborate, other traits, a whole history of prior routes, a condensation of disseminations and associations. The example is always in excess of the closed economy of signification imagined by the model/example binary. The illustration always brings in traits that the model cannot account for, and must be structurally blind to if the rhetoric of exemplification is to command belief. The example is thus always ‘out of the frame,’ continuously displacing the boundaries of signifier/signified (the ultimate model of semiosis).

My claim is that this comprises the core (that is to say, the myrtle anti-core) of the baroque hypothesis drawn, painted and written by antropofagia. The image (‘illustration,’ ‘example,’ the ‘quote,’ ‘metaphor’) is a mode of visual deconstruction – of deconstruction through the image – which is folded back into a text which in turn declines to proffer itself as ‘descriptive’ of the image but helps ‘draw out’ the imagetext’s full potential. In short, it constitutes an emblematics. The uncertainty as to what is model and what is example, of what models what and to what end, this principled ‘inconstancy’ that breaks open the logic of the example and discursive-pictorial hierarchies, is what is at work in the imagetext of the manifesto, as originally published with a drawing by Tarsila, “after a painting that will be displayed in her next exhibition in June at the

exhibition at the Percier gallery in Paris,” as the caption narrates (Figure 7.1). The name of the painting the drawing points to is withheld, the name we pretend we do not know so as to allow the image its full force: *Abaporu*. The omission of the name of the image already effects a contradictory textual-visual superimposition foregrounding the difference between drawing and painting, the line and colour. The text already calls forth the future superposition of *caipira* colours onto this black and white ‘demonstration.’ It already takes account of the work of the *parergon* in advance: it does not attempt to restrict the anarchic flow of association and displacement. The drawing is “named after” an image we do not get to see for ourselves; it is named after an image located in the future (one month after the publication of the first issue of the *Revista de Antropofagia* in May 1928, when Tarsila will display the ‘real’ painting in June), while being transposed to Europe. We must retrace our steps and are encouraged to imagine a different, more colourful image instead of the ‘underdeveloped’ sketch the page offers. We receive the austerity of black-and-white in counterpoint to the carnival promised by the text: “We were never catechized. What we really made was Carnival. The Indian dressed as senator of the Empire” (Andrade 1991, 40). This black-and-white *Abaporu* wears no breeches (cf. Montaigne); indeed he responds to the demand of the naked truth against “clothing, that raincoat placed between the inner and outer worlds. The reaction against the dressed man” (Andrade 1991, 38). Yet, there are no longer the ‘savage,’ unmixed colours ‘illustrating’ Brazilianness. This *Abaporu* is a dressing-down of the painting. Furthermore, *Abaporu*, Rodin’s tropical thinker, thinks through the text of the manifesto, but his lessons are located in the elsewhere indicated by the caption: “Paris,” the “Percier gallery.” The caption signals a dislocation: the ‘original,’ non-derivative painting, full of colour, will be on display in Paris, the capital of primitivism and epicentre of the ‘historical’ avant-garde. The distance between São Paulo and Paris endows the manifesto imagetext with an added irony, the punch line of coloniality. *Abaporu* marks the return of Montaigne’s cannibal to his ‘native’ soil – a strange ‘encore’ of the Rouen spectacles of 1550 and 1562 in which Tupi Indian were brought in as part of a display of French colonial power.³⁵² The figure is brought back – again it is a case of the mantra “routes,

³⁵² Of course, this is an anachronism, but anachronism and counter-genealogy are the essence of the

routes, routes, ...” (Andrade 1991, 40) and “logbooks” (ibid., 46 n16) – to his Old World place of birth, the continent where he was constructed through erudite displays of artifice and tales of discovery, to become one in a million-fold of etymological ‘mistakes’ (cf. Chapter 6).

However, what this Paris audience does not know is that it has been converted to cannibalism, following Jarry’s second option of “how to *do* anthropophagy,” viz. by undergoing it (Jarry 2001, 250). Little do these cosmopolitans suspect, walking past the Percier gallery, perhaps even setting foot inside, seduced by Tarsila’s exotic *caipira* colours, that they have now become part of the antropofagia revolution in São Paulo, ‘over there,’ unknowing partisans of the Carib Revolution proclaimed by the “Manifesto Antropófago” in some obscure Brazilian literary journal. *Abaporu* is the resumption of the inaugural symposium, the “Swallowing of Bishop Sardinha” in the sixteenth century (Andrade 1991, 44). *Abaporu* is a critical counter-spectacle. As the caption text announces, Paris is a locus of antropofagia, where the devouring of the sacred enemy will be taking place through the visual ruse “after a painting by Tarsila,” an aesthetic object

manifesto imagetext. What it points to is the structure of repetitions and temporal condensations that accompany all stories of origin. Frank Lestringant highlights the tragic iteration of the 1550 visit twelve years later, intimating the reversal of Marx’s famous formula, which, in the case of both Royal spectacles, the farce would precede the tragic. Rather, farce and tragedy, imitation and original, the comic and the melancholic are no longer distinguishable: both spectacles, both displays of the Tupi body become tragic farces. As Lestringant observes, whereas the 1550 spectacle celebrating Henri II’s glorious entry into Rouen enacted the myth of the Golden Age with the help of Brazilian cannibals imported to ‘play the part,’ the November 1562 pageant marks a ruinous repetition, in which the Tupi Indians are made to perform yet again, but this time in a “Rouen just reconquered from the Protestants by the armies of the King (...). The royal troops had pillaged the town for twenty-four hours. In the days and weeks that followed, the punishment of the heretical party, which had governed the city unchallenged for six months, allowed the settling of many an account. When order was finally restored, King Charles IX, then aged twelve, and his mother, Catherine de’ Medici, made their solemn entry into the town. It was at this point that Montaigne made his appearance. Here, then, is Montaigne, against the background of a city that has been taken by storm and laid half in ruin, talking to us about a subject which seems quite irrelevant: the Cannibals, who has just disembarked from Brazil and were, to say the least, taken aback by the disorder which they found in this highly civilized Europe, whose merits the missionaries had so insistently described to them during their voyage. (...) Far from voicing the expected admiration, they expressed only doubt and astonishment. Certainly, their proud replies were such to perplex their royal interlocutor. They were astonished by this child king, still more taken aback by the juxtaposition of rich and poor, and wondered how the latter ‘could endure such injustice without taking the others by the throat and setting fire to their houses’” (Lestringant 1997, 1-2). What followed was “Of Cannibals,” an anthropophagite ventriloquism by a French intellectual, superimposing the ‘astonishment’ by the Tupi onto his own.

for eyes on the lookout for the newest in primitivism. The Tupi cannibal comes back under a newly constructed name, a new ‘error,’ a new fanciful etymology, but this time seemingly under the spell of the surrealist praxis of juxtaposition, a name pasted together from words found in some missionary’s dictionary. However, as the manifesto declares, “We already had Surrealist language” (ibid., 40). *A-ba-po-ru*: it might have been part of a Futurist poem, written in the mode of *parole in libertà*. Yet, this word-in-freedom is underwritten by a history of colonialism: the avant-garde is superimposed with an unsought colonial-historical inflection, allowing a glimpse of the ideology covering over primitivism’s search for renewal.³⁵³ Indeed, the manifesto hints at a politically suspect genealogy underlying the dream of rupture and ex nihilo beginnings of the Paris avant-gardes. Surrealism is but a name for the resurrection of Tupi ontology through Jesuit etymology. Antropofagia is a parodic appropriation of the idea of the avant-garde, a critical deglutition uncovering the underbelly of coloniality through a Baroque *demonstratio* of the intertwining of Santiago’s ‘beginning’ and ‘origin’ (cf. Chapter 5). A similar tension and intertwining - in the guise of the poetic chiasmus - imbues the Tupi-

³⁵³ Owing to the more restricted scope of my analysis, I cannot do justice to the full complexity of the notion of ‘primitivism’ and its constitutive relation to the idea of Western Modernity, its appropriation in art historical accounts and its imbrication with coloniality. I will restrict myself to providing some important accounts that explore these vexed issues in more detail. For an important account of primitivism dealing specifically with the Latin American context and that focuses on a wide array of cultural production (film, visual arts, popular culture) in relation to Modernity, transculturation and ethnography, see *Primitivism and Identity in Latin America* edited by Erik Camayd-Freixas and José Eduardo González (2000). For a detailed discussion of primitivism as it pertains to Western art historical discourse in relation to colonialism, see *The Myth of Primitivism*, edited by Susan Hiller (1991). In *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress*, Shelley Errington (1998) develops the thesis that with primitivism the European avant-garde created a new category of artefacts, subsequently further commodified through tourism. Marianna Torgovnick (1990) gives a more general account of the Western fascination with all things ‘primitive’ in *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. On the intersection of Modernity and primitivity, and the latter’s constitutive role in the construction of the ideology of the modern, see *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, edited by Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (1995). For the controversial 1984 exhibition at the MoMa juxtaposing ‘primitive’ artifacts and canonical modernist art works, see the exhibition catalogue *‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, edited by William Stanley Rubin. For an account of the critical debate generated in the wake of the *Affinities* exhibition, as well as texts by artists, critics and art historians working at the height of the primitivist and art nègre vogue, see *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: a Documentary History*, edited by Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch (2003). In *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics*, Frances S. Connelly (1999) traces the emergency of the aesthetics of primitivism back to Giambattista Vico’s *Scienza Nuova* (1725), and relates the surge of European primitivism in the context of the avant-garde during the first half of the twentieth century to the Romantic discourse of exoticism. For a general introduction to primitivism in the visual arts, see *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* by Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, and Gillian Perry (1994).

Guarani lines “Catiti Catiti / Imara Notià / Notià Imara / Ipeju” (ibid., 41), which Oswald translates in a note as “new moon, oh new moon, blow memories of me into [the man I want]” (ibid., 46 n19). Oswald’s apparently ‘original’ chiasmic sound poem, as well as the translation he provides, are citations from statesman, anthropologist and amateur folklorist José Vieira Couto de Magalhães’s *O Selvagem* (The Savage, 1875), a “classic of Brazilian ethnology,” part of which is concerned with transcribing the “nomenclature of Tupi gods,” as Lorena Janeiro points out in her translation of the manifesto (Andrade 2011, 16 n16). The sounds of the new are but the traces of a speech captured by the scriptural economy - and the *ars poetica* - of coloniality. These are skilful ‘memories’ ‘blown back’ - that is to say, *written back*, and not spoken back as the *anima* of the moon seems to suggest - into the future. They now belong to the poetics of *ars memoria*. The manifesto is a memory palace tracing the routes of coloniality, and the latter’s implication in the fantasy of avant-garde beginnings.³⁵⁴ The manifesto imagetext carries out a space-time reversal, showing that the avant-garde had already been long underway in the New World, through baroque artifice and its chiasmic indistinguishability with Tupi ontology (cf. Chapter 6). Antropofagia is the site of the *retombée*, of reversals in cause and effect. As such, it poses the force of analogy against the closed logic in which the rhetorical roles of word and image are distributed in terms of model and example, authenticity and imitation.

If antropofagia were to be understood as a kind of education of the senses, its lessons would be a Baroque heuristic, making one experience that, in the words of W. J. T. Mitchell, “all arts are ‘composite’ arts (both text and image); combining different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes” (Mitchell 1994, 94-95). The shifting and continual relinking of speaking and seeing, the inherent instability of the word and the image and their mutual contaminations is what makes it

³⁵⁴ The manifesto goes on to state that “without us, Europe wouldn’t even have its meager declaration of the rights of man” (Andrade 1991, 39). This further highlights the entanglement of Modernity and colonialism. As Neil Larsen puts it, the manifesto “plays ironically on the ‘theory’ that the Enlightenment discourse of natural right, leading from Locke through Rousseau and ultimately to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Bourgeois Revolution as such, has its origin in Montaigne’s ‘noble savage,’ based on the first reports from Brazil of ‘cannibalism’ among members of the Tupinambá tribal aggregate” (Larsen, 1990, 80). The manifesto seems to suggest that freedom, equality and brotherhood – and the Kantian dream of the autonomous subject – are but the effects of a European misreading of Tupi cannibalism.

impossible to stabilize antropofagia into an image or definition. The name is its own model, and cannot be ‘exemplified’ since its logic is formulated in defiance of the logic of illustration. Antropofagia performs the “de-disciplining of the division between [the] visual and [the] verbal” (ibid., 100). In this de-disciplining heuristics, the baroque hypothesis enacted by antropofagia approximates Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s construction of Baroque-Tupi ontology as a principled inconstancy (cf. Chapter 5), which, in my adaptation, is transposed to the relation between word and image. It gives shape to a radical inconstancy, a ‘forminess’ always receptive to new re-shapings through the influx of otherness that impresses itself on the amorphous mass. The ‘self’ of Tupi ontology is a form in progress, a form lacking in definite outlines, always in motion, forming and unforming, with only moments of stability. Against the ‘classical thesis’ of the hard marble of culture, the baroque ‘hypothesis’ makes the marble undergo a process of ‘corruption’ through the metaphor of myrtle, folding itself inside the cracks – the traces of history – of its hard, stable edifice. The baroque hypothesis gives shape, through experimentation, to a radical, alloplastic “mimetic enthusiasm” (Castro 2011, 19) used against the ‘model’ it does not imitate, but superimposes to the point of polemical deconstruction, to its anarchic unraveling in hypertexts and hypericons. *Antropofagia* operates on a ‘logic of devoration’ that makes its *modus operandi* explicit: the transubstantiation of images back into text, text into image, enlivened by eyes, voices, memory and gestures. There is nothing to guarantee their continuing existence except the contingency of re-linkings through rituals of perception, reading, viewing, moving and thinking – of coding, decoding and un-coding. Adriana Varejão is the artist who poses this hypothesis most forcefully.

7.2 Adriana Varejão and the Erudite Inconstancy of Word and Image

7.2.1 A Diptych of Counter-Conversion

In their voyage to Minas Gerais, the first generation of anthropophagites is joined, after a lapse of time of over sixty years, by contemporary artist Adriana Varejão.³⁵⁵ Her trip to the epicentre of the Barroco Mineiro is presented as equally foundational in the negotiation of past, present and future, an unending polemic that is played out in her visual art. In talking about this voyage of re-discovery, Varejão remembers her awe when visiting the Baroque churches of Ouro Preto. In her own words,

It was a real shock, I was in rapture! (...) It was the first time I'd ever been inside a Baroque church. It was as if the matter was 'dancing'; bold, alive, powerful, teeming. To me, it was a strange alchemy between gold and blood, richness and drama. I've often been back to Minas. The churches are like jewel boxes containing complex, fascinating, carnivorous jewels that are capable of ingurgitating any foreign element, taking disseminated fragments and accumulating them, deforming them and integrating them into their sacred universe (qtd. in Sollers 2005, 81).

Varejão's memoirs are a reprise of Tarsila's *ars memoria* of the Barroco Mineiro. They also echo Tarsila's memories of Raul Bopp and Oswald de Andrade's 'shock' when laying eyes on *Abaporu* (cf. Chapter 5, 5.2.1). Here, again, is a scene of revelation inscribed within a rhetoric of conversion and discovery, but this time the cannibal logic is made explicit. The epiphany of the 'carnivorous,' the 'accumulation,' the 'ingurgitation' of 'foreign elements,' the transmutation of blood into gold, the 'fragmentary,' the work of 'deformation' of the jewel – the irregular, *barrueco* pearl is almost literally present in Varejão's text – all these elements accrue into a memory palace for the Baroque itself: the Baroque is both what is remembered as well as the means of that remembering. The Baroque as topos is superimposed with Antropofagia: the 'teeming' of matter is made

³⁵⁵ For my reading of Tarsilwald's neobaroque rhetoric of epiphany upon seeing the Barroco Mineiro, see Chapter 5 (5.2.1 in particular).

legible as the deglutition of the ‘foreign,’ as a constitutive alloplasticity/allomorphism. “The only things that interest me are those that are not mine. Law of man. Law of the anthropophagite” (Andrade 1998, 536). Furthermore, this ultra-baroque ‘discovery’ – ultra-baroque since what is discovered simultaneously shapes the language of discovery itself – is a most erudite discovery, a discovery learned through the book. “I first discovered the Baroque through a book on Baroque churches in Brazil. I was already saturating my canvases with a lot of paint, creating very thick surfaces” (qtd. in Sollers 2005, 81). It seems Varejão has lined up all the right words, all the signifiers that have now come to connote ‘barquicity’ in a self-conscious self-parody of the unexpectedness of discovery. Like Columbus, Varejão did not set out to ‘discover,’ but to ‘verify’ (cf. Giunta 1995), and the ‘event’ of discovery is precisely what is made ironic. What was discovered, the unexpected, was anticipated from the very ‘beginning,’ embedded as it is in the never-ending play with tradition, with Santiago’s notion of ‘origin’ (cf. Chapter 5).

Varejão’s paintings are the ‘verification’ of the baroque hypothesis. More precisely, they are further experimentations in the art of contestation announced by Oswald de Andrade’s “Anthropophagite Manifesto” through an over-saturation with layers of paint and history. Adriana Varejão’s paintings are an adaptation of Oswald’s principle of “permanent contradiction,” showing how coloniality makes one inhabit a paradoxical ‘non-place,’ a continuously shifting, folding and unfolding ‘living museum’ of antagonisms. Her work makes the manifesto newly legible, and charges it with unforeseen meanings, thereby adding to an already dazzling display of superimpositions. More specifically, Oswald’s “Manifesto Antropófago” can be read through Varejão’s *Proposal for a Catechesis; Part I, Diptych: Death and Dismemberment* (Figure 7.2), while the *Proposal* becomes newly visible through the manifesto: both enact an emblematics in which word and image enter in complex relays making up a relation of inconstancy that counters the logic of the example (cf. Chapter 7, 7.1). The title of the work *Proposal for a Catechesis; Part I, Diptych: Death and Dismemberment* (Figure 7.2) already points to the tension between the desire for inscription and the resistance to that inscription; it already announces the antinomy of origin and beginning. The words of the title both anchor and de-anchor, both grasp and loosen the image.

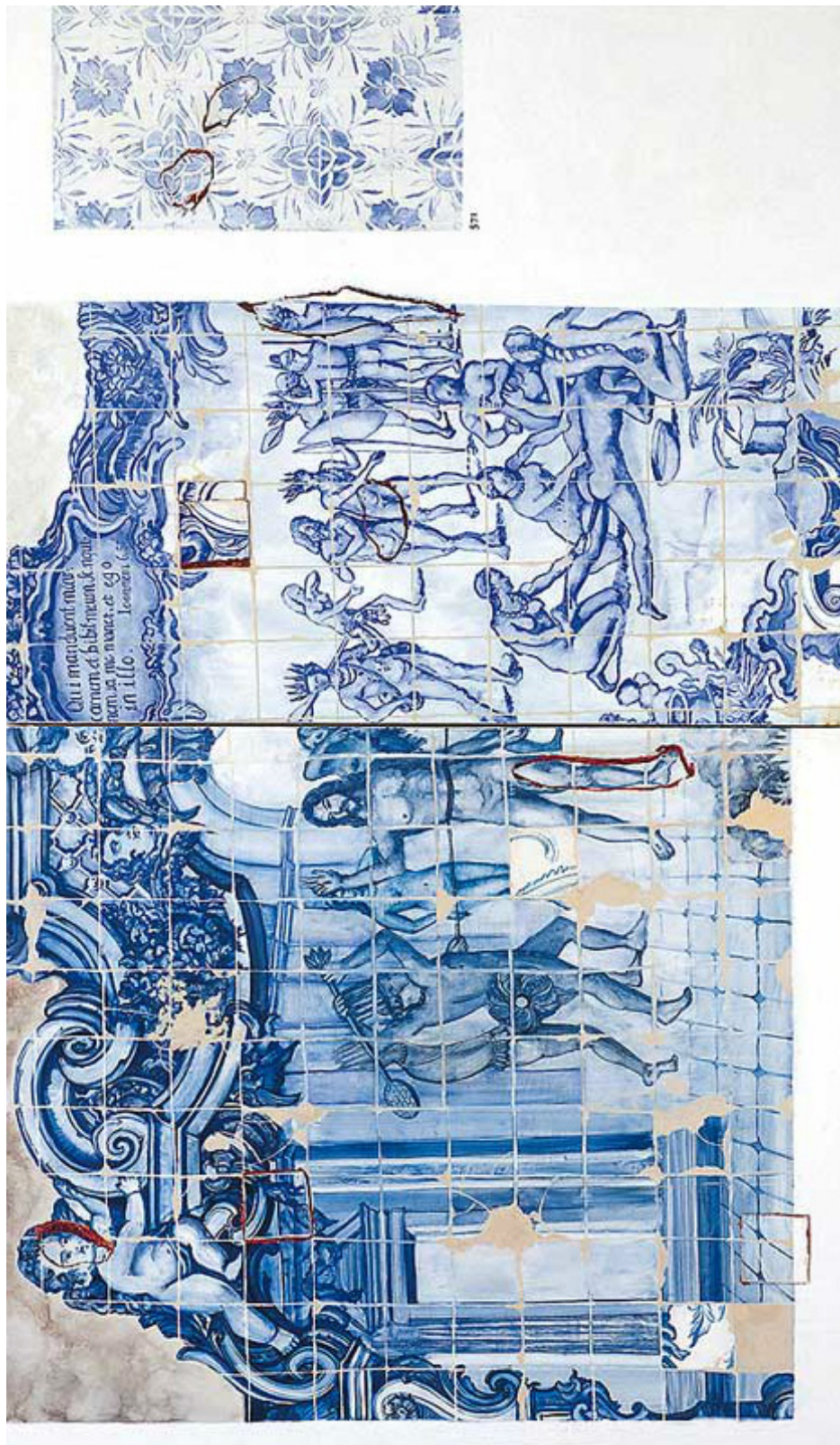


Figure 7.2 Adriana Varejão, *Proposal for a Catechesis, Part I. Diptych: Death and Dismemberment*, 1993. Oil on canvas, 140 x 240 cm. [Diegues and Sardenberg 2009, 64].

The word ‘proposal’ already makes clear the polemical-satirical intentions of the painting through its allusion to and re-appropriation of the literary canon of the ‘North.’ Varejão formulates her own “Modest Proposal” for a counter-catechesis by invoking and inverting Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden to Their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Public” (Swift [1729] 2010, 295-302). Antropofagia is the (immodestly) modest proposal, presenting the devouring of the sacred enemy – the ingurgitation of the ‘foreign’ Christ – in order to make the inconstant Tupi – here superimposed upon the Irish – adhere all the better to their colonial masters, a conflation of the ‘papist’ Spanish and Portuguese with the British protestants. It shows the reversal of roles a truly syncretic solution would demand. The old, ‘heathen’ practice of Tupi cannibalism, as well as the ‘inconstancy’ of the Tupi soul in general, can only be overcome through the amalgamation of the indigenous ritual and the ‘imported’ ritual of the Eucharist and Catholic transubstantiation as depicted by Varejão. Tupi inconstancy can only be converted through the further literalization of the *sensus literalis* of the Catholic Eucharist, by making the Word into body, and having the Tupi eat the Word so as to speak it.

The friction between speech, matter, and writing is also evident through the designation of *diptych* within the title of the work, placing it in close proximity with a prominent Western religious and pictorial tradition, with its entire history of visibility and legibility. Varejão plugs her painting into a vast body of religious art, historical scholarship and theology, a veritable tradition of erudition. Moreover, the name of the image invokes the technology of writing as such, considering the etymology of the word *diptych* derives from the Greek *diptukha*, ‘pair of writing tablets.’ This, in turn, conjures up the image of the Mosaic Law, set in twin tablets, whose essence is glottographic communicability and scriptural exegesis. Varejão’s diptych is the representation of the immortalization of the Cannibal Law, but by doing so it becomes a parody of the setting in stone of God’s Commandments as communicated to Moses and transcribed by his hand. The ten instructions are here reduced to one single law, the cannibal law: one God, one King, one Law is rendered quite literal. “The world’s single law. Disguised expression of all individualism, of all collectivism. Of all religions. Of all peace treaties

(...) I am only concerned with what is not mine. Law of Man. Law of the cannibal” (Andrade 1991, 38). In Varejão’s counter-memorial, it is Christ, the *host* - with its inevitable entanglement of sacred enemy and sacrificial victim through the etymological confusion of *hostis/hostia* (cf. Chapter 6) - who is speaking, and whose words are ‘captured’ in a glottographic Baroque caption. He is the one formulating the law, the founding principle of the Carib Revolution. Following Renaissance pictorial convention, his index finger indicates that his body is the locus of speech, a speech transcribed in the Baroque caption in Latin. The ‘defiant speech’ of Christ the ‘canibalee,’ the *host* about to be devoured, proclaims a tropicalized Christian law. The only law is Christ’s “Law of the cannibal” (Andrade 1991, 38): *qui manducat meam carnem et bibit meum sanguinem in me manet et ego in illo*, “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him” (John 6:56). The law formulates the principle of inversion, and Christ is made to speak the law of parody, in which law and commandment are equal to their transgression since the cannibal law, as put forward in Oswald’s manifesto, is “the transfiguration of the Taboo into a totem. Cannibalism” (Andrade 1991, 42). The commandment is the commandment to disobey and allow for radical inconstancy, for baroque heteronomy and subversion against the fantasy of self-determination.

This gesture of parodic de-inscription is heightened since it is merely nominal as, materially speaking, Adriana’s work is not a diptych. It is the painted simulation of a diptych; it is a configuration of oil on canvas giving the illusion of a diptych - it is visible as diptych by virtue of its name only. Of course, the divine irony resides on the level of representation and mimesis itself: this is a diptych memorializing a Tupi version of the Passion of Christ. In this counter-diptych, Christ’s sacrifice is depicted as a sacred culinary event. He is not made to suffer on the Cross, but is allowed to speak the cannibal’s ‘defiant speech.’ The image tells the story of what could have been, if the Tupi had been capable of truly incorporating Christianity, rather than having to learn it by heart, through hearsay, through mindless memorization - through catechesis, in short.

In his discussion in *Tristes Tropiques* of the short-lived and disastrous French mission to Brazil led by Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon in 1555-58, Claude Lévi-Strauss presents the French as casuists who, in the midst of an epidemic, were embroiled

in heated “theological tournaments,” with Protestants attempting to “convert the Catholics, and vice versa. Instead of working for survival, they spent weeks in foolish discussions: How should the Last Supper be interpreted? Should the wine be diluted with water before consecration?” (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 83). By contrast, the Tupi appear as pragmatic, experimental empiricists, testing the truth of the Christian hypotheses, placing their faith in the ‘natural sciences’ as opposed to the Christians and their futile doctrinal debates. Further testimony to this pragmatism is the behaviour of the natives of Puerto Rico, who, on Levi-Strauss’s account, tested the doctrine of immortality attendant on Christian baptism by capturing conquistadores in order to drown them. After a few weeks, and observing that the laws of putrefaction did apply to these self-proclaimed children of god, they could come to the only logical conclusion possible: these visitors were liars, and conversion to Christianity would not lead to eternal life and redemption (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1955, 80).

Silviano Santiago expresses reservations about this secularizing trope of Indian experimentation and ‘scientific’ pragmatism - the attitude of induction - that resisted the importation of religious debates surrounding the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Instead, he reads the same ‘pragmatic’ attitude as symptomatic of an indigenous attempt to attain sacred epiphany, as bespeaking a desire to experience first-hand a truly religious phenomenon the way the missionaries had promised (Santiago 2001, 27-28). Commenting on the consequence of the missionary zeal that prepared the indigenous tribes into receiving God’s word, Santiago observes that the “Indians were more than eager to witness the biblical miracle and experience religious mystery in all its enigmatic splendour. Thus, for the Indians the proof of God’s power should reveal itself not so much through the passive assimilation of the Christian word but rather through the vision of a truly miraculous act” (Santiago 2001, 27). The demand of the Indian for the experience of the sacred is what Varejão’s *Proposal* highlights, in that it shows the Indian enacting the performative intent of Christ’s words so as to live the sacred. To use Castro’s terminology - as derived from Vieira’s - Tupi ‘pragmatism’ is the manifestation of the ‘inconstant soul,’ always willing to allow the influx of the ‘foreign’ to shape and transform its being (cf. Chapter 6). Tupi pragmatism is immanent: it is not concerned with the divide between the secular and the divine. What counts is the mode of the

hypothesis, no matter if it concerns the ‘religious’ or the ‘scientific.’ Hypotheses of the sacred can be tested just as much as those of the natural sciences, since both are placed on a continuum of the experiential, of the experimental. Belief in the word is immaterial, and can only be an effect since “happiness is the proof of the pudding” (Andrade 1998, 538). The sacred must stand the test of aesthesis: it is a matter of taste - an acquired taste - of a non-discursive knowledge almost bordering on the idiosyncrasy of the palate. Varejão shows the preparation and degustation of the pudding, the palate put together by her palette. The *Proposal* paints the hypothesis, the verdict still undecided as the banquet will never end, at least not as it is painted.

Adriana’s diptych is an irreverent object of veneration; it is a depiction of an apocryphal event to be worshipped on an altar in some parallel universe, had history taken a different route. It is a monument to the “Carib Revolution,” where, to paraphrase Oswald’s formula, the taboo has indeed turned into a totem through the cannibalistic absorption of Christ’s sacrifice. Christ is not memorialized in the eternal suffering on the Cross; his resurrection is assured through his after-life in the Tupi body collective. If God is dead, it was only to give life via the *sensus literalis* of his marrow for the sake of an immanent, actual after-life. Against the resurrection and transcendence - the worshipping of an absent God, an ontotheological concept - as the outcome of the Last Supper, this First Banquet subsumes Christianity under a radical, anti-dogmatic Tupi religion of the body, of hypothesis and experimentation. One tenet of the manifesto has come true – it has materialized, right here, with paint, in commemoration of the birth of a truly mixed-breed religion, a religion of the body.

Furthermore, it seems to be a catechism of utopia, in that the presentation of this counter-genealogy instructs us into the aleatory nature of history as it is written and depicted. In the words of Ricoeur, the function of utopia is “to free, retrospectively, certain possibilities that were not actualized in the historical past” (Ricoeur 1988, 192). Only retrospectively can the import of a certain rupture in the ideological fabric be made intelligible. Utopia is the anticipation of something to come that can only be gauged with reference to the past; it involves both memory and anticipation. The painting is a diptych commemorating and instructing us into the miracle of utopia, by “calling authority into

question to show that society need not be integrated in the way that it is,” as David M. Kaplan writes with respect to Ricoeur’s notion of utopia (Kaplan 2003, 139). “We were never catechized,” is the alternative catechesis, the alternative integration Oswald proposes in his Manifesto. If read as a catechesis, then the main article of faith of the manifesto reads: “we were never catechised.” The painting suggests that the viewer should take this lesson to heart, to learn by heart that Brazil was never catechised – at least not through colonization. In fact, as Oswald continues in his manifesto, “we made Christ be born in Bahia. Or in Belém do Pará,” a Christ thus born and reborn, or rather, imported to a New World Bethlehem (Belém), in a never-ending cycle, as the diptych shows. Redemption is not promised through the sign of the Cross, through the commemoration in the Eucharist of Christ’s sacrifice in the story of the Passion and his resurrection. Redemption is promised in following through with the anthropophagic act, in being excessively true to the ‘body’ – and not the spirit – of the word.

In Varejão’s *Proposal*, Christ, having become cannibal by virtue of his being its willing ‘patient,’ is incorporated in antropofagia logic and recast as spokesperson and prophet of the Carib Revolution, de-appropriated from the Christian pictorial-scriptural economy in a Tupi subversion through superposition. “But those who came here weren’t crusaders. They were fugitives from a civilization we are eating” (Andrade 1991, 41). Carib history started with the devoration of the Christian, “in the 374th Year of the Swallowing of Bishop Sardinha” (ibid., 44). The conquistadores did not transform the South under the sign of the Cross. Rather, they were unwittingly ‘integrated’ in a secret history that the Manifesto is now able to divulge, accompanied by Varejão’s ‘recording’ of the moment of Christianity’s conversion to antropofagia.

7.2.2 The Azulejo, Landscape and Academicism: Varejão's Counter-Colonial De-Inscriptions

The discomfort of Varejão's apocryphal historiography is signalled by the cracks in the Portuguese tiles, which reveal visceral substrates that "expose a wounded interior, suggest the history of violence, mutilation, and displacement that underlies the ordered and decorative exterior of a culture" (Armstrong 2000, 126). Varejão mobilizes the visual idiom of the *azulejo*, which was used to depict mythological, biblical, and allegorical stories in churches, stately colonial buildings and other sites of institutional power, in addition to being used in modest shops and homes.³⁵⁶ In Brazil as in Portugal, this square blue-and-white terracotta tile became, in the words of Louise Neri, the "inner skin of religious and secular buildings, homogenizing the architecture into a seamless and illusionistic pictorial home" (Neri 2001, 19). The Convent Church of Saint Francis in the capital of the state of Bahia, Salvador, built in the early eighteenth century (but only completely finished towards the beginning of the nineteenth) and funded by wealthy sugar plantation owners, is an example of colonial Brazilian art combining the *azulejo* with lavish gold decoration (Figure 7.3 and 7.4), and it is this stately Baroque idiom Varejão alludes to with her apocryphal *Proposal*.

³⁵⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the historical background of the *azulejo*, and its relation to the work of Adriana Varejão, see Lilia Moritz Schwarcz's essay "Paved and Tiled by Adriana Varejão," in Diegues (2009, 143-156). For a general introduction to Portuguese tiles and its Moorish influences, with a focus on Lisbon and other Portuguese cities, see the lavishly illustrated *Portuguese Decorative Tiles: Azulejos* by Rioletta Sabo and Jorge Nuno Falcato (1998).



Figure 7.3 Azulejo wall decorations (interior). Church and convent complex of Saint Francis in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. 1755.

[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_W1O0wrbAX3k/SNBGHTxUYAI/AAAAAAAAACqg/bgGEyAZlqVU/s400/igreja+s%C3%A3o+francisco,+salvador.jpg].



Figure 7.4 Azulejo decorations (exterior), convent courtyard. Church and convent complex of Saint Francis in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. 1755. [<http://imgms.viajeaqui.abril.com.br/1/foto-galeria-materia-620-dw.jpeg>; http://farm3.staticflickr.com/2570/4189566545_f0f967f3f1.jpg]

The world-renowned Portuguese rectangular ceramic plaque, whose facing surface is decorated and glazed, is, if we are to believe Count Anathasius Raczynski's words addressed to the Berlin Scientific and Artistic Society in 1845, nothing less than the emblem of a national essence, as it "is part of Portugal's physiognomy" (qtd. in *ibid.*). The azulejo is a site of overdetermined meaning, a nodal point of diverse cultural legacies drawing upon Moorish lace and loop designs, exotic Oriental china, early medieval European animal and plant motifs, ornamental features of the Italian Renaissance, topped off with a short-lived period of Dutch influence. In the heyday of eighteenth-century baroque, the azulejo was pictorial shorthand for a triumphal Portuguese colonial empire, whose coffers were filled by resources coming from Brazil and India (cf. Neri 2001, 19-21; Schwarcz 2009, 143-156). By depicting scenes of dismemberment, the *Proposal's* ceramic scene enforces a disturbing remembrance, a history of violence glossed over by dominant historiography but that is now, in counterpoint, burnt and glazed into the "physiognomy" of Brazil. After the demise of the Portuguese tile industry, Brazil continued to develop this aesthetic legacy, and Varejão revisits the colonial iconography – but with a twist.

In *Azulejaria de Cozinha com Caças Variadas* (Kitchen Tiles with Varied Game; Figure 7.5), Adriana decorates her kitchen with a mixture of strangely disconnected tile patterns. On a background of tiles with birds, flowers and more abstract plant motifs, the varied game – parts of a chicken, fish, veal, a hare, a piglet, and a ham – dangle with solidarity next to a human torso, parts of an arm, leg and a small hand. *Kitchen Tiles* explores a strange sort of 'culinary art,' alluding to the cannibal trope, while at the same time giving a radical literalist reading of the 'melting pot.' What strange lesson can be learnt here, if we maintain that the kitchen is a pedagogical space for the instruction in aisthesis? What secret family recipes are being passed on from one generation to another in this uncanny kitchen? What memories might be bequeathed here, what 'minor' knowledge is transferred silently, in the preparation of dishes for the lavish dining tables of history?



Figure 7.5 Adriana Varejão, *Kitchen Tiles with Varied Game*, 1995. Oil on canvas, 140 x 160 cm. [Diegues and Sardenberg 2009, 68].

The decorative tiles, with their fish, their botanical and ornithological diversity drawn from Brazilian fauna and flora, are strewn with body parts ready to be skinned, filleted, and prepared, including human limbs. The contrast between elegant tile-motifs and cut-up bodies “echoes the paradoxical coexistence of beauty and brutality during the baroque era in Brazil” as well as the “historical forging of bodies in the making of the Americas” (Armstrong 2000, 106). The kitchen, as metonymy of the domestic, of the home, the *oikos* - and by extension the economical *tout court* - has been transformed into the locus for the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Foucault 2003, 10). In Varejão’s re-visioning, the colonial kitchen, as site of the ‘house-slaves’ of history, now provides a crude counter-metaphor for the excessively cruel economics of colonialism. The subversive Baroque combinatorics (and re-combinatorics), of the tiling and re-tiling of colonially, produces meaning through the unsettling work of analogy, in which a

human hand now resembles a hare, and legs have become fish: the painting engenders Baroque monsters. There is no specific meaning that holds the tile-work together; each moment of viewing effects a new combination and reconstruction of fragments, which, as was the case in the *Proposal*, cannot be made whole again. The body-Gestalt has been deformed in a confusion of mineral - the azulejo itself - vegetative and animal souls. However, these are but simulated fragments painted on the integral surface of a canvas: re-tiling everything back to an originary wholeness is merely a fantasy the painting itself disallows and exposes as nostalgic, erudite melancholia.

Not only the azulejo, but the landscape as well is an inheritance of colonial regimes of legibility. In the painting *Meat à la Taunay* (Figure 7.6), Adriana Varejão serves her viewers an uncanny meal. This raw flesh torn from the canvas of a copy of a Brazilian landscape painted by the French academic painter Nicolas-Antoine Taunay (1755-1830), is dished out on seven porcelain plates styled after the Dutch West India Company's china. The production history and export trajectory of porcelain is in itself an intricate story - an 'intrigue' - closely associated with that of coloniality. Porcelain, as well as the azulejo, come with an elaborate network of historical and geographical "routes, routes, routes, routes, routes, routes, routes" (Andrade 1991, 40). Elizabeth Armstrong highlights the flow and deterritorializations of capital as condensed in the material of porcelain.

The West India Company [was] a Dutch company that engaged in economic warfare with Spain and Portugal in South American territories – and [the porcelain plates] reference the popularity of chinoiserie in the decorative arts of the period. Via trade routes, this style was exported from Asia to Europe, where it became fashionable and was subsequently imported into Brazil (Armstrong 2000, 105).

Representation itself has become food for thought, served on a commodity that is as artificial and historically overdetermined as the landscape one feasts one's eyes on. The canvas is presented as a carnal space, thereby not only negating the original disingenuous innocence of Taunay's painting in his construction of a transparent, luxurious Eden without exploitation, but by extension also the hegemonic imposition of supposedly 'universal' modes of imagining.



Figure 7.6 Adriana Varejão, *Meat à la Taunay*, 1997. Oil on canvas and porcelain, installation with varying dimensions, 65 x 75 cm (canvas). [Diegues and Sardenberg 2009, 102].



Figure 7.7 Nicolas-Antoine Taunay, *View from Morro da Glória*, ca. 1820. Oil on canvas, 47 x 57 cm. [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/95/Nicolas-Antoine_Taunay_-_Vista_tirada_do_Morro_da_Gl%C3%B3ria%2C_c._1820.jpg].

In fact, Varejão's dissected painting is *View from Morro da Glória* (Figure 7.7), which Taunay finished during his stay in Brazil with the French Artistic Mission of 1816. This mission was seminal in the artistic 'education' of Brazil and the importation of an erudition the *modernistas* will combat with *Pau Brasil* and *antropofagia* (cf. Chapter 5, 5.1.1).

The French Artistic Mission was led by Jean Baptiste Debret, "one of Napoleon's favourite portrait painters" (Sadlier 2008, 112), who had studied at the French Academy of Fine Arts under Jacques-Louis David, "to whom he was related" (Santiago 2001, 17). After the defeat of the French emperor, Debret and a number of other bonapartist artists and educators, viz. Nicolas-Antoine Taunay and his brother and sculptor Auguste-Marie, professor Joachim Lebreton, architect Grandjean of Montigny, sculptor Marc Ferrez and the engraver Charles Simon Pradier, were invited by King João VI to Rio de Janeiro, who offered them exile and protection from the forces of the French Restoration (cf. Sadlier 2008, 111-113). As such, academicism forms part of South America's historical 'accidentalism,' and again testifies to the manifesto's dictum that "those who came here weren't crusaders. They were fugitives from a civilization we are eating" (Andrade 1991, 41). In addition to highlighting the cannibal logic of devoration, Varejão's *Meat à la Taunay* is a reminder of the infinite folding of the binary hegemony/periphery and the aleatory working of history in the reversal of roles. Once at the socio-political centre of Europe, these now-marginalized artists and legislators were forced to flee to the periphery, who welcomed them with open arms and devoured their know-how, shaping its own imaginary through the influx of the 'foreign.' In this strange mix of civilizing mission and forced exile, of a peripheral hegemony or hegemonic periphery exported into the court of an exiled monarch (King João VI), the French became instrumental in the institutionalization of the visual arts in Brazil. Soon after its arrival, the Mission set up an arts and crafts lyceum (Escola Real de Artes e Ofícios), which "later became the Academia Imperial de Belas Artes (Imperial Academy of Fine Arts) under Emperor Dom Pedro I" (Santiago 2001, 17). The figure of Jean Baptiste Debret merits special attention since in 1829 he

organized the first arts exhibition ever to take place in Brazil, in which he presented many of his works as well as of his disciples. Debret returned to France in 1831 and became a member of the Academie des Beaux Arts. From 1834 to 1839 he published his monumental series of three volumes of engravings, titled *Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Brésil, ou Séjour d'un Artiste Français au Brésil* ('A Picturesque and Historic Voyage to Brazil, or the Sojourn of a French Artist in Brazil') (ibid.).

Not only did the French Mission change the artistic landscape of Brazil, it also imported its image of Brazil back, shaping the European imaginary through a legibility centred on terms such as 'exotic,' 'lush,' 'abundance' and so many more.³⁵⁷

Nicolas-Antoine Taunay was enchanted by the novelty of the Rio scenery, while keeping strictly within the European canon of representation. His iconography does not deviate from the well-established compositional demands of the pastoral: through the lens of the hegemonic imagination, Brazilian visuality is romanticized and rendered Arcadian. It becomes legible as a utopian locus of a boundless yet harmonious nature, devoid of conflict or contradiction. Lavish plants, peaceful friars, elegant architecture, farm animals and the occasional noble savage (but no hint of the brutality of slavery) populate these idyllic visions.³⁵⁸ Thus, in addition to importing a distinctively European model of institutionalization, the artists of the French Mission contributed to an iconography that would frame Latin America in terms of exoticism and primitivism. More generally speaking,

Taunay's paintings – along with those by other artists who were sent to document the splendour of the New World – offered an outside vision of Brazil that helped to form the ways in which Europeans envisioned the Americas as well as contributing to the native populations' conception of themselves (Armstrong 2000, 105).

³⁵⁷ Incidentally, Adriana Varejão produced a set series of disfigured, eviscerated reworkings of Debret's depictions of the "Picturesque and Historic Voyage to Brazil" in her series *Terra Incognita* – e.g. *Bastard Son* (1992) and *Bastard Son II, Interior Scene* (1995) – of which *Meat à la Taunay* and *Meat à la Frans Post* also form part.

³⁵⁸ Inspired by the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau to live a 'natural life,' Taunay built a small cottage in the Tijuca forest. However, this contact with the 'state of nature' did not last long. Disgruntled by the new direction of the Royal School where he was teaching landscape painting at the time, and specifically with the replacement of Joachim Lebreton with the Portuguese painter Henrique José da Silva as head of the academy, Taunay returned to France in 1821, where he would devote himself to history painting. Political intrigue - the height of 'erudition' so to speak - trumped 'nature' (cf. Sadlier 2009, 112).

In an iconoclastic gesture, Varejão lacerates the full canvas, whose red simulated viscera – a mass of red glossed-over paint – expose an unexpected physical fullness at odds with the level surface of the pictorial plane. The wounds left by the incisions are indices of the colonial violence sutured by a hegemonic aesthetics. The smudges on the canvas and its ‘insides’ are of a bright, almost incandescent hue, attesting to the freshness of the wound, as if assuring its afterlife in the present. Varejão confounds the dichotomy between past and present as the painting suggests an instantaneous interruption of the present through the irruption of an irreducible past, a past that is not to be subsumed within a redeeming teleological narrative. Compromise has been ruled out; no dressing can ever sufficiently cover up this gaping wound, let alone heal it. In the moment of viewing, a subaltern past returns and ferociously negates Taunay’s utopian mirage of pacified exoticism.

Through the superimposition of flesh, porcelain, and landscape, Varejão’s image effects a Baroque subversion of classical *ars memoria* through a juxtaposition of incongruent visibilities and legibilities. As with Tarsiwald’s rediscovery of the Barroco Mineiro, the reframing and re-citation of past legibilities/visibilities operates a disturbance of the architecture of the memory palace, in which what was forgotten comes back through a rearrangement - a new superimposition, a novel association within a never-ending *ars combinatoria* - of what was already available.

7.2.3 The Proposal: The Inconstancy of Word and Image

Adriana Varejão subverts the pious through a radical re-contextualization, turning her *Proposal* into a gesture of counter-catechesis by using ‘reverent’ tiles as a medium to recreate and subvert canonical scenes of colonization from a Western pictorial economy. In effect, Adriana’s *azulejo* scene is a collage of two early modern engravings by Theodor de Bry (1528-1598), which appeared in his popular collection *Grands Voyages*,

published between 1590 and 1634.³⁵⁹ The first depicts a proud prisoner speaking before his execution (Figure 7.8), while the second illustrates the culinary preparations by cannibal women of a freshly slain body (Figure 7.9), which, in Adriana's rendering, appear in sequence. In her version, the proud prisoner is transformed into Jesus Christ.

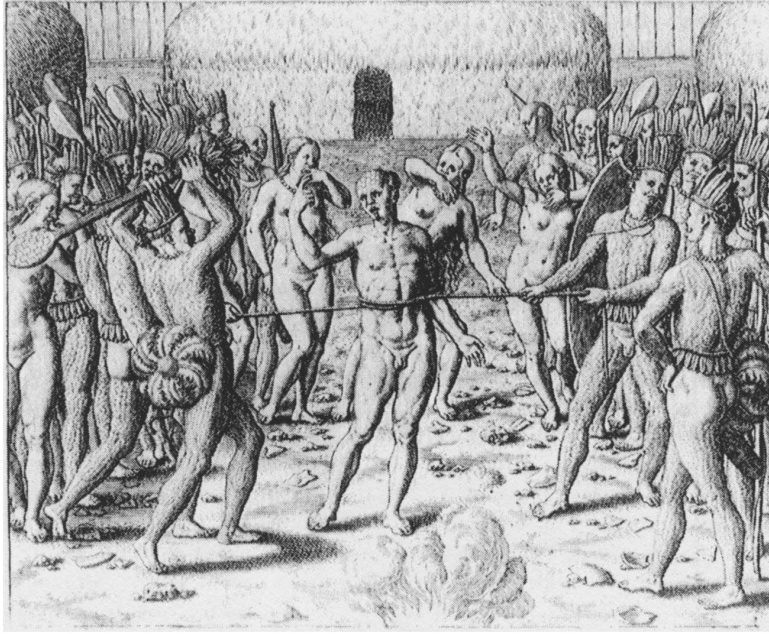


Figure 7.8 Theodor de Bry, engraving of proud prisoner speaking before his execution. Plate from Volume 3 of the *Great Voyages*, “Voyages to Brazil: Hans Staden 1549-55; Jean de Léry (Villegaignon expedition), 155-58,” 1592. *Americae Tertia Pars*, The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities. [Klarer 1999, 397].

³⁵⁹ Between 1590 and 1634, the De Bry family published thirteen volumes of the *Grand Voyages*, “under the editorship first of Theodor de Bry, then of his sons Johan Israel and Johan Theodor, and finally, of Matthaus Merian, their successor” (Bucher 1981, 3). The Huguenot family relocated from Liège to Strasbourg, London and finally Frankfurt-am-Main where they found refuge from the threat of Counter-Reformation persecution. For a detailed account of how the *Grand Voyages* encode the struggle of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and how the visuals are a theatricalization of European religious polemics onto a ‘New World’ stage, see Bernadette Bucher’s *Icon and Conquest: A Structural Analysis of the Illustrations of De Bry’s Great Voyages* (1981).

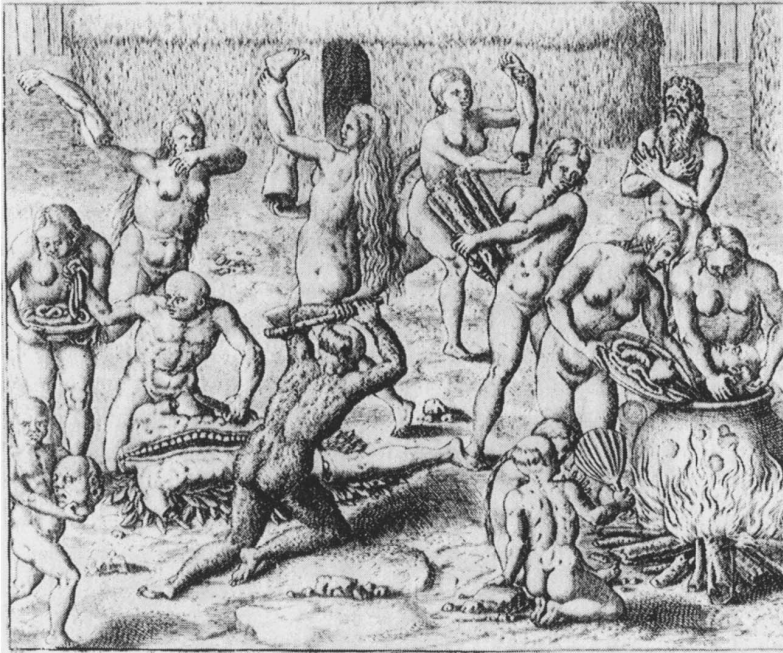


Figure 7.9 Theodor de Bry, engraving of cannibal women preparing a dead body. Plate from Volume 3 of the *Great Voyages*, “Voyages to Brazil: Hans Staden 1549-55; Jean de Léry (Villegaignon expedition), 155-58,” 1592. *Americae Tertia Pars*, The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities. [Klarer 1999, 401].

De Bry’s engravings of the New World envision the ‘new’ through the pictorial canons of the Old World. The pictorial economy of the *Grands Voyages* is informed by the classical European standards of representation, much in the same way that the discovery of America was produced through familiar regimes of legibility and narrative genres. As Bernadette Bucher points out, the *Great Voyages* mark a transition point between the European medieval imaginary with its fantastical monsters and flights of fancy, and a modern, classical conception of beauty already adhering to a developing Renaissance canon of figuration, much in the same way Columbus’s conceptions revealed the contrast between the medieval imagination and emergent scientific Renaissance humanism.³⁶⁰

If it were not for a few items of dress and ornamentation, and other exotic detail, one would think that the figures came from an artist’s anatomy plates, which can be found in the painting and sculpture of that time – the statues adorning the palaces at the end of the sixteenth century,

³⁶⁰ For more on the birth of the cannibal and Columbus’ role in the rhetorical construction of the figure, see Chapter 6 (6.2).

the figures of antique gods, portraits of Roman athletes, Italian Venuses with long, wavy, hair; or, at the other extreme, visions of medieval monsters, grimacing and deformed witches, headless men, dwarfs and giants of the forest (Bucher 1981, 32).

The depiction of the unfamiliar, of Tupi ritual cannibalism in this case, is thus already shaped by conventions of figuration already in place. The Tupi bodies are figured in conformity with classical beauty, “contemporary taste and the canons of the *beau nu*” (ibid., 33) with traces of the medieval imaginary, making for a hybrid of the beautiful and the grotesque.³⁶¹ Combined with the literary figuration of the cannibal in terms of defiant oration, as the transfer of the conventions of a receding chivalric idiom upon the body of a noble savage as set forth by Montaigne (cf. Chapter 6), the cannibal appears as the site of condensed colonial scriptural-pictorial inscriptions and envisionings.

Taking this scriptural-pictorial economy as her cue, Varejão opens up the surface of the image so as to insert a parodic counter-point, laying bare the aleatory substructure of history and its configuration - the ever-shifting *ars combinatoria* - of legibility and visibility. Never one to shy away from religious teaching (Figure 7.2) – fingers pointed upwards as signal of catechesis and speech – Christ instructs the savages in the central doctrine of transubstantiation. In a Baroque ‘speech balloon,’ we can read an excerpt of the Scriptures teaching us that *qui manducat meam carnem et bibit meum sanguinem in me manet et ego in illo*, “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him” (John 6:56) – which, read through the “Manifesto Antropófago,” signals the parodic inaugural moment of the Carib Revolution and its dogma of parody, its anti-dogmatic ‘inconstancy’ (cf. above). The Catholic dogma of transubstantiation is a zone where the tension between metaphor and the literal is at its highest, where the ambiguity between the image as *eidolon* and the image as *eidos* is most outspoken (only to be cordoned off by the doctrinaire territorialisation through ‘spirit’). Transubstantiation is based on an interpretation of the rhetoric of ingestion, and the discourse of cannibalism. The ambiguity between the figural and the literal, between the spirit and the letter of the text

³⁶¹ As Bucher formulates this pictorial conversion of the unknown along the contours of the known, “the engravers had no choice but to use the nude forms canonized in art: bodies of Roman or Greek statues and Italian virgins, or else medieval monsters, gaunt and hideous old women; dwarfs or giants. The differentiating elements – ornaments, items of clothing, and the attributes of war, hunting and fishing – must be hung, so to speak, on these forms traditional to European art” (Bucher 1981, 35).

is already thematized in the Gospel itself. This is what Georges Didi-Huberman (1998, 190-203) highlights in his imaginative rereading of Christ's anthropophagite speech at Capernaum, and which I take as my point of departure for revisiting Adriana's *Proposal* in terms of the inconstant relation between word and image. After hearing Jesus' cannibal speech at the synagogue of Capernaum, the majority of his audience is disgusted, and leaves, scandalised. At the end, Jesus will insist that he was merely speaking metaphorically, "in spirit, and not in body" (Didi-Huberman 1998, 200). To quote the Gospel of John,

Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?' But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, 'Do you take offense at this? (...) It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.' (...) After this, many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him (John 6:60-66).

This afterthought, the exegetic self-correction anchoring the eating of flesh and blood according to spirit and not the flesh of the word, seems to bespeak a domestication of the radicalness, of the shocking truth of the *jouissance* his words promise 'in body' - a truth too hard to swallow even for some of his own believers. If taken literally, at the level of the body, the words convey their most disturbing potential, their most 'graphic' possibility. At stake is the gap between image and word, and flesh – in other words, between the visual, discourse and embodiment, between ingestion, reading and viewing. Because of its inclusion and emphasis on the word as embodied, and the imagery of ingestion as prerequisite to 'speak my word,' the triad suggest an ontology that goes beyond mere resemblance as it resides at – or rather, exceeds and puts into question – the limit separating the literal and the metaphorical, the word and image, between what is said, what is meant and what is imagined.

By substituting the figure of the proud prisoner with that of a proselytising Christ, Varejão's painting presents the Tupi cannibals as Christ's most faithful disciples, ready to follow him even into the depths of the most unfathomable – the most nonsensical – *jouissance*. At the same time, it seems they are testing Christ's faith in his own words. Perhaps, if this white shaman's words are true, and his strange ritual speeches do have an effect on the flesh, I will experience the miracle of transubstantiation and thus partake of

eternal life: the sacred is the realm of immanent experimentation. Anthropophagy, from this perspective, would then be an attempt by the Indian to attain a sacred epiphany, as an expression of a desire to experience first-hand a ‘foreign’ religious phenomenon. It suggests a desire for conversion through bodily transformation and not just through the mechanical repetition of oral instruction, with its steering of the word through the safe haven of transcendence and spirit. In short, the image is a testament to Tupi inconstancy, to a Baroque superimposition that allows thought to explore the anarchy of aesthesis into the unknown, towards the ‘new.’ It is the point where the superposition of the most erudite layers of legibility and visibility becomes so overloaded it folds over into incomprehensibility and indiscernibility – learnedness as madness.

It is precisely the demarcation between meaning and nonsense that the painting interrogates. When looking closer at Adriana’s *Proposal*, when taking in its complexities, when, ‘after looking for a long time’ as Oswald had done with *Apaboru*, we might notice imperfections, stains, red smudges on the canvas, elements that do not seem to have any precise meaning. We start to see chips and cracks in the tiles, smudges, traces of flesh, irregularities in the texture, pieces of tile that are coming loose, mysterious spots of red pigment – somehow evocative of blood, perhaps even the blood of Christ? These are in fact traces attesting to the materiality of art as a praxis, as a way of making, a *modus operandi* that leaves debris without determinate meaning, no clear signified that could satisfactorily sum up the reason for its presence. These marks are aleatory and reside outside of the representational, mimetic and narrative economies of the painting. They comprise those uncertain moments where we cannot decide whether these strange ‘blind spots’ are actual parts of the composition, or whether they are merely incidental, or perhaps even the effect of mishaps in the reproduction – we have trouble linking the visible to the legible, to make an account of their insistent presence. It is imperative to be susceptible to moments of incoherence in the picture, so as to allow the visual – as the illegible – to fully envelop perception, and not to cut the experience short by invoking the familiar patterns of representation – to invoke a *sensus spiritualis* or to dismiss the accidental as a failure of visibility/legibility. This is of course not to say that the stains cannot assume some sort of allegorical value, they can of course be re-linked into a configuration of meaning: the cracks and displacements of tiles can be indications of the

passage of time, of the work of the elements on the material, as well as a reference to the progressive decay of memory. In addition, one could begin to imagine the red dye as speaking to the covering up of violence through coloniality's rhetoric of justification. From this perspective however, smudges and stains begin to assume symbolic value, and will start to resemble something else, something that would help articulate the meaning of the image as a whole, where the stain is ready to be subsumed into a fixed meaning, into an 'illustration' of a more general discursive claim. It is precisely the logic of the example that Adriana resists when stating that "I don't like it when the flesh in my work is associated with the 'martyrdom of colonized peoples.' I prefer the role of agent to that of victim" (qtd. in Sollers 2005, 95).

The image is agent, and not token – such is the baroque hypothesis (cf. section 7.1). Forcing the image to perform the work set out by a discourse framing itself as *explanandum* amounts to distributing clearly defined roles and incorporating the image in a readymade narrative. This is an act of ekphrastic violence - the forcing of such a meaning onto the painting would mimic the colonial operation of co-ordination itself, as a vehicle to affirm mastery, a narcissism that disciplines the image into a discursive regime so as to smooth over the *décalage* of the seen with the said, figuring the unknowable as if it were an object of knowledge. Or, as W. J. T. Mitchell (1994, 157) points out, in drawing an analogy between ekphrastic violence and colonial repression, as well as referring to the discipline art history imposes on its objects of knowledge,

The 'otherness' of visual representation from the standpoint of textuality may be anything from (...) a relation of political, disciplinary, or cultural domination in which the 'self' is understood to be an active, speaking, seeing subject, while the 'other' is projected as a passive, seen, and (usually) silent object. Insofar as art history is a verbal representation of visual representation, it is an elevation of ekphrasis to a disciplinary principle. Like the masses, the colonized, the powerless and voiceless everywhere, visual representation cannot represent itself; it must be represented by discourse.

The indeterminate non-signs, the smudges on the canvas can only be suggestions of possible meanings. What they really do is break open the integrity of illusionistic space by insisting on their sheer presence, indifferent to a viewer's attempts to decipher the enigma of the painting – the painting itself will never give the answer to what it means; it

de-disciplines the viewing and reading eye. At the moment the painting articulates and seems to open up to an interpretation that would settle the mystery, these obstinate signs without a code revoke and retract, and fall back upon themselves. Like the smudges of dead flies on a windshield, they prevent us from fully attaining a synoptic view, from assuming a transparent panorama of signification, of exhaustiveness. If they are to be seen as a sign, they should be considered the signs of the maintenance of the enigma that is the painting, in confrontation with a verbal order that tries to give an account of its meaning(s); as such, they insist on silence, the muteness and recalcitrance of the visual. The main tenet of Adriana's catechism – and perhaps its lesson extends to all forms of discursivization of the image – is this: the issue is not how to overcome or leave behind the instrumentality of the sign, but how to incorporate it in such a way that shows how its superpositions produce interruptions and make new sayings and viewings possible. The Baroque hypothesis is the experimentation in the generation of unanticipated visibilities and legibilities. The moment of non-representation – of the affective force – is precisely that which “wrests experience from an overwhelming conformity,” from a reduplication of the logic of coloniality as the regulation of the visible and the sayable, the demand that the image conform to the word, to forcing the image to behave in an ‘exemplary’ fashion.

This brings us to a further lesson. The canvas is never empty; it is never a blank surface. In the case of Adriana's body of work, this can be taken quite literally. Because of the irreconcilable tension between origin and beginning, the canvas is always saturated even before the act of painting. “Art is nothing but pure culture. Art comes from art and not from nature” (qtd. in Sollers 2005, 81), is how the artist puts it. This insistence on artificiality can be understood as an expression of baroque sensibility. The red pigment is pigment, and not blood. DNA analysis would yield nothing biological; no filiation, no paternity would be established – the stains are purely synthetic. The *azulejos* are not really tiles, but painted simulacra: they mimic the form, the consistency, and the brittleness of tiles by other means. The painting gives the impression of illusionism, and uses artistic means to simultaneously retract this *trompe l'oeil* – the eye might be fooled, but the other senses will not. In their insistent materiality and artificiality, the cracks and smudges remind us of a very basic, even base, truth. After all is said and done, paintings are meaningless, they are layers of pigment on canvas: “pictures have no words and

therefore they do not ‘say’ anything” to quote James Elkins (1999, 255).³⁶² Meanings are what we hallucinate into the image, onto a surface of paint, lines, and stains; but these hallucinations are necessary to talk about images and texts, so they can teach us a lesson.

In the end, the lesson is that of no lesson at all; the lesson is that of a disciplining of the border between text and image, of their infinite intertwining. In *Dialogue on the Conversion of the Heathen* (1557), a dramatization of the catechism so as to make it more palatable to his converts, Jesuit missionary Manuel da Nóbrega formulates the main obstacle in trying to convert the Tupi to Christianity as their “being so easy to say yes or *pá* to everything, or whatever you like. They approve of everything right away, and with the same ease with which they say *pá* [‘yes’], they say *aani* [‘no’]” (qtd. in Castro 2011, 7). This indifference to the law of non-contradiction, this ‘vegetative inconstancy’ (cf. Chapter 6) can be a lesson to the demand for a stable demarcation between image and word, visibility and legibility. “Tupi or not tupi, that is the question” (Andrade 1991, 38) is how Oswald tropicalizes – in English in the Portuguese version of the manifesto – Hamlet’s ontological dilemma. The answer, if it can be said to solve anything at all, is given in the manifesto: “we never permitted the birth of logic among us” (ibid., 39). And yet, logic and erudition is what the manifesto is steeped in. But it is a logic that drives logic mad, allowing nothing to serve as example, revelling in the flexibility of its self-contradiction, the “permanent contradiction” (ibid.) of what divides the visible from the legible.

³⁶² And even if they do contain words, it is in order to question the demarcation between the pictorial and the written, as I demonstrate in Chapter 2 (2.4).

Conclusion

8 By way of Conclusion: Closing the Diptych, Drawing the Line

I will close the diptych with a brief, ‘impressionistic’ reflection on a constellation of images. Its purpose is to retrace some of the routes drawn in the main text, while at the same time charting new ones, in staying true to the principle of neobaroque dispersion. This closing is a new ‘fold’ of the text: I will read the neobaroque of Part 2 back into the legibilities/visibilities proposed in Part 1, reading and viewing Torres-García’s work in the mode of ‘baroque reason.’³⁶³ At the same time, Adriana Varejão’s work will provide a way to think through the oscillation between discontinuous regimes of legibility and visibility. Most importantly however, this conclusion will show the ‘inconclusiveness’ of the preceding text in highlighting the work for the future. Surrealism is only peripherally addressed throughout the work, as somewhat of a blind spot. It will require another book-length study to reflect on the constellation of surrealism, antropofagia and constructive universalism. The diptych will have to become a triptych, and the following observations provide a glimpse of possible future legibilities and visibilities.

In “Grids,” the opening essay of *The Originality of the Avant-Garde* (1985, 9-23), Rosalind Krauss recounts the development and ultimate consolidation of the high modernist grid in visual art, now having reached a ‘stalemate’ to become a figure of empty, post-modern repetition. The grid, she writes, has become the “emblem of the modernist ambition within the visual arts,” the crystallization of “modern art’s will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse,” the drawing of trench lines “against the intrusion of speech” (ibid., 9). For Krauss, the grid is the declaration of art’s autonomy, equated with a turn against nature and a renunciation of mimesis - it is not simply non-figurative, it is presented as anti-figurative in terms of its supposed anti-

³⁶³ What I mean by ‘baroque reason’ is explained in the second introductory section of Chapter 5.

narrativity.³⁶⁴ The grid, as the paradigm of the myth of the avant-garde and its canonization in terms of absolute rupture - hence also its exorcism of speech, language and the non-visual in general - would find its most stringent articulation in geometric abstraction. The rigidity of the figure ultimately sealed its fate. As Krauss puts it,

it is safe to say that no form within the whole of modern aesthetic production has sustained itself so relentlessly while at the same time being so impervious to change. It is not just the sheer number of careers that have been devoted to the exploration of the grid that is impressive, but the fact that never could exploration have chosen less fertile ground. As the experience of Mondrian amply demonstrates, development is precisely what the grid resists. But no one seems to have been deterred by that example, and modernist practice continues to generate ever more instances of grids (Krauss 1985, 9).

The example of Mondriaan should have made clear, once and for all, that the grid has no more life left in it; it was ‘sterile’ to begin with. And yet, no one seems to have taken this depressing pedagogy of the grid seriously. What adds to the fated dimension of the grid is its “resistance to change” (ibid., 23), its unwillingness to change, its static nature, and the fact that “development is what the grid resists” (9). This is its fatal flaw, which was the lesson of “the experience of Mondrian” (ibid.). Art should stop gridding, and should never have started.

But is this truly the end of the story? By considering the ‘grid/walls’ by Joaquín Torres-García, it will become clear that Mondriaan should perhaps have heeded the ‘example’ of the Uruguayan painter. Or rather, what the essay demonstrates is that the image of the grid as a rigid structure is the effect of Krauss’s rhetoric, which does not engage in any close reading of grid compositions. As such, the inflexibility of the grid-structure disconnects it from other possible legibilities of the grid, grids that allow language in rather than exorcise it. It is in the ‘painterly’ grids of Torres-García that one can find such a counter-grid, a ‘baroquing’ of the grid.³⁶⁵ However, as I have argued in

³⁶⁴ As Jacques Rancière suggests, this image of autonomy bypasses the shift in legibility that made abstract art conceivable in the first place. See the General Introduction for more on this subject.

³⁶⁵ I am invoking Heinrich Wölfflin’s (1964) conception of the ‘painterly’ style as characteristic of the baroque. Torres-García’s series of grid/Inca wall paintings charge the pictorial surface with a dynamism through the tonalities of light, while at the same time simulating the patterning of Inca masonry. It is this

Part 1 of this study, the theory of constructive universalism did not read its own practice in this way. It conceived its work as the continuation of the Inca tradition of pure, tectonic abstraction, while at the same time adhering to the ‘eternal’ principles set forth by the rhetoric of purity of the abstract movement of the European avant-garde. It must be stressed that in the case of these hybrid grids, the theory was equally at odds with what the images demand to be thought through: the interlacing of the figurative and the abstract, of decadence and purity – pictorial-verbal *mestizaje*.

Consider the cover of Torres-García’s book *Estructura* (‘Structure’; Figure 8.1) published in 1935, which contains a reproduction of a painting by the same name (Figure 8.2).³⁶⁶ Cecilia Buzio de Torres notes that in this text, Torres-García

condemned imitative figurative art, and classified Renaissance painting as decadent. ... In contradiction to the conventional idea that the more realistic the representation of the object, the more advanced the art, this classification promoted geometric art as a superior stage of development (1992, 12).

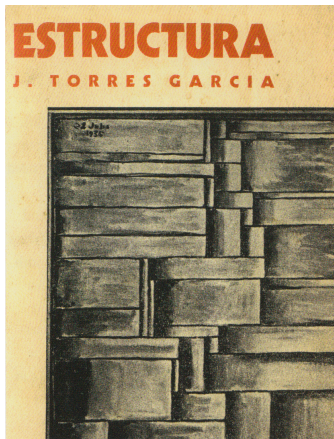


Figure 8.1 Joaquín Torres-García, cover of *Estructura* (Montevideo, Ediciones La Regla de Oro, 1935). [<http://l.yimg.com/g/images/spaceout.gif>].

superposition that makes the grid/walls slide in and out of figuration. For more on the baroque, see the second introductory section in Chapter 5.

³⁶⁶ Torres-García made a host of similar images by the same name, endlessly recombining the possibilities afforded by this strict economy of means in an almost endless series of *Estructuras*.



Figure 8.2 Joaquín Torres-García, *Structure*, 1935, oil on cardboard 78.5 x 62.5 cm. Alexander M. S. Vik Collection. [Rowell 2009, 82].

There is a discontinuity between the title as ‘anchor’³⁶⁷ and the image. Juan Fló notes the tension between the notion of structure, and its abstract geometric overtones, with the painterly tradition, notably Renaissance techniques of representation. However, he holds onto the ‘exemplary’ function of the image in relation to the word, and insists that the image depicts what the title declares. Even though they are “halfway between sculpture and painting” (Fló 1992, 33), the art historian holds onto the view that the paintings of the grid/wall series constitutes some of the most geometrically disciplined, abstract works Torres-García ever produced. It is worth quoting Fló at length here, because he so eloquently phrases the contradiction between legibility and visibility, while

³⁶⁷ In Chapter 4 (4.3), I provide a gloss of Roland Barthes’s notion of ‘anchorage’ as a function in the word-image dynamic.

ultimately grounding a 'solution' for the problem the image poses by resorting to the regime of legibility constructed by "the painter's ideas." These do nothing less than "dissolve" the discontinuity posed by the picture plane and constructive universalism's ideology of purity.

It is not unusual to find Torres-García's constructive works utilizing some of the traditional effects of painting to produce an image of bulk, although without ever creating the depth of an atmospheric space. ... In reality, in the case of the shadings of the Montevidean period, precisely the opposite is happening. ... [T]he shaded blocks, usually monochrome and without the schematic signs ... represent constructive art's greatest austerity. The painting ... paradoxically utilizes a traditional representational effect in order to accomplish a pure structure and simultaneously maintain a reference to reality. As Torres had already understood in 1919, and as he stated again in his article in *Cercle et Carré* in 1930 and would repeat in another mode in 1947, there is a way of perceiving reality, of capturing visual relations called up by the real world that, without having anything to do with figuration, discovers in the world a special tonality that the artist transposes in his work. In fact, although he did not resign himself to cutting his ties with reality and affirmed that the artist should always start from it, he suddenly said ... that one must start from geometry and not from the actual shape. But an acquaintance with the painter's ideas dissolves the contradiction: one should start from geometry when dealing with the shape of the object, at the level of figuration; and start from reality when attempting to give the work a certain indefinable sense that is peculiar to visual reality (Fló 1992, 33).

The theory, in fact, does not resolve any contradiction. The discontinuity merely changes tonality, it modulates over time, and reconfigures itself over his painterly oeuvre. The grid images are not of the 'highest austerity' but instead evince a playfulness in their engagement with tones and shading, making figuration and abstraction bleed into one another. The image cannot be anchored through the divide abstraction/figuration. The structure is loosened through its evocation of stone, effecting a rhythmic oscillation where structure and figure enter a space of undecidability. The painting, through its 'painterly thickness,' gives the impression of naturalism, while at the same time pledging allegiance to abstraction by the invocation of the grid. Thus, a complex negotiation between decadence and purity is established: the pre-Columbian is reframed through the colonial, and vice versa. It is a testament to as much as it is a repudiation of coloniality, a performative contradiction countering the austerity of Torres-García's theoretical

statements. The grid becomes opaque, it loses its transparency. Against Krauss's reification of the grid as aniconic structure, the grid can be seen as that which invites a host of (contradictory) discourses. Torres-García experiments with the grid as expressive form, in that it effects relays of discourses and iconographies. It is this 'erudition,' the engagement with regimes of legibility and visibility – with its 'quotation' of Inca walls and ruins, the formal experimentation of geometric abstraction as well as the whole of the 'representational regime' from the Renaissance onwards – that endow the grid with earthiness and flexibility. The paintings are layered articulations, the neobaroque superimposition of the tectonic, Andean paradigm as well as the exploration of the compositional possibilities of the grid, as both autonomous and heteronomous at the same time. The infusion with Renaissance techniques makes the image doubly enigmatic as to what its 'logical' claims are: it short-circuits hermeneutics altogether.

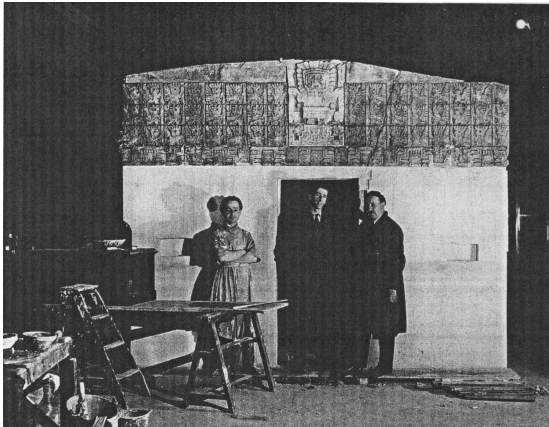


Figure 8.3 "Charles-Georges Barberis, Georges-Henri Rivière and Langlois in front of the Gate of the Sun, 1931. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris" (Rowell in Ramírez 2009, 126). [Ramírez, ed., 2009, 126].

In fact, these grid/wall paintings give body to a diagrammatical inquiry of indiscernibility, through the *modus operandi* of visual association. Whether or not these images stand in a continuous relation with perceptible reality is only of secondary importance. What matters is the radical 'artificialization' and *mestizaje* of regimes of visibility and legibility through the work of analogy and the juxtaposition of artefacts. These enter into a constellatory relation with sketches, archeological remnants, photographs, museal objects, and archival material. The images are part of an infinite chain of recombination, part of an *ars memoria* that further folds out memory as a

material process of montage and collage. It is worthwhile remembering that Torres-García never drew these Inca-like structures ‘from life,’ since he never visited the archeological sites. Neither did he compose them from memory, but with the help of memory aids, i.e., the Trocadéro museum (Figure 8.3)³⁶⁸ and photographic documentation (Figure 8.4). The photo of the child seated in front of the Inca wall gestures to an irreducible *mestizaje*, to the cohabitation of the ruin with the actuality of hybridity. Torres-García’s paintings say as much, in their elaboration of “multiple temporalities” that converge in the neobaroque and, by the same token, constitute the modernity of the South (cf. Moraña 2005, 250; Kaup 2006, 128-152).

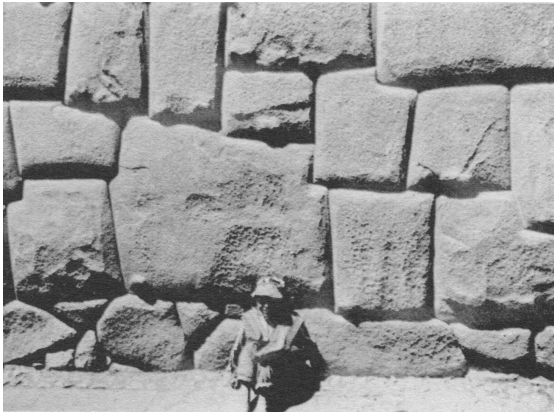


Figure 8.4 Inca wall, Hatunramiyoc (Cuzco), Musée de l'Homme, Paris. [Rowell 2009, 40].

The sketchbooks emulate the play of light of the photographs, of other drawings and images, forming their own ‘infinite relation’ (Figure 8.5).³⁶⁹ They are experimentations in formal composition, yet they also emulate the tonality of the back-and white, the grey zones of the photo-camera. These are images *of* abstraction; they paint abstraction naturalistically, while inflecting them with the echoes of Inca abstraction. Abstraction becomes opaque, evincing that same ‘ontology of the surface’

³⁶⁸ As Margit Rowell points out (in Ramírez 2009, 118-129), “the full-scale plaster model of the gate of the Sun at Tiwanaku dating approximately from AD 800 ... was originally cast for the Trocadéro museum collections in 1878; Rivière reinstalled it in its prime position in 1931. Torres-García was an assiduous visitor to these galleries, where the gate of the Sun made a strong impression” (126).

³⁶⁹ On the notion of the ‘infinite relation’ between the sayable and the seeable as Foucault (1970) discussed it in his reading of *Las Meninas*, see Chapter 7 (7.1).

Sarduy (2010) spoke of. These images do not depict but improvise on the Andean paradigm of abstraction, yet at the same time creating ruins of utopia, structures that have never existed except on paper, or in paint. They are the definite refutations of the rhetoric of purity and authenticity.

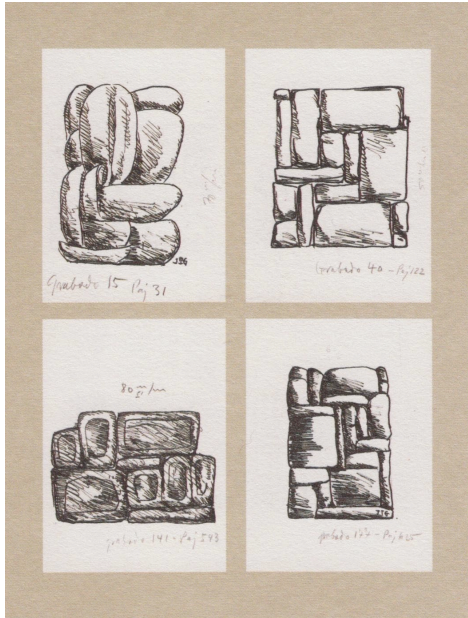


Figure 8.5 Drawings for *Universalismo Constructivo*, 1943. Ink on paper, 22 x 17 cm. Museo Torres-García, Montevideo [Rowell 2009, 83].

Torres-García was a master in the art of visual association, leaving the enigma of their resemblances intact. He was as much of a master as Freud, that other athlete of free association. As Jean Laplanche puts it in his reading of the *Interpretation of Dreams*,

‘free association’ (*freie Assoziation*) or ‘freely occurring ideas’ (*freie Einfälle*) are only the means employed for the dissociation of all proposed meaning. An analytical method, then; one that is supposed to conform to the object it posits - the ‘representation’ termed ‘unconscious’. Because of the very mode of our access to it, we are entitled to postulate the absence, in this object, of any synthetic meaning (Laplanche 1996, 7).

However, there must come a moment when the ‘session’ must stop, when meaning enters. The deterritorializing flow of analogies will be reterritorialized by a concept, around which meaning can organize itself. For Freud, association is anchored through the notion of ‘wish fulfilment.’ Commenting on the dream of Irma’s injection, which Freud subjects to the anarchic flow of associated images, allowing the demon of analogy free

rein - the dream is not a dream, but a hyper-dream, like Torres-García gives life to hypericons - Freud arbitrarily ends the dynamic of asemiosis by coiling back to the safety of hermeneutics.

Here Freud presents us with twenty pages of association, of deciphering - but without any codes, certainly without any one-to-one correspondences; twenty pages of unbinding (*Entbindung*) operating on the more or less coherent narrative of the dream. The associative pathways are followed, the points of intersection are noted, but no synthesis is proposed. The chapter ends with deceptive abruptness: 'I have now finished the interpretation of the dream ... it becomes obvious, the dream is the fulfilment of a wish.' (ibid., 8)

For Torres-García, his chain of recombination ends with 'Abstract Man.' The logic of illustration is invoked to halt the accumulation of disparate images, which he feverishly collects in his scrapbooks. These assemblages of heterogeneous images from across the world and throughout time trace 'associative pathways' that are redirected onto the discernment of 'Abstract Man,' the eternal 'structuring' principle he sees everywhere. That is to say, he discerns it insofar it has been made visible, and legible, in photographs, diagrams, sketches and other material he uses in his grand collage of abstraction (Figure 8.6 and 8.7).³⁷⁰ Constructive universalism in effect constructs the universal - through collage.

³⁷⁰ The precise lesson of this associative exercise, other than that they supposedly 'illustrate' 'Abstract Man' and 'Structure,' is difficult to gauge, since the associative method is particular to the extreme. It takes a very specific, individual eye to see what connects these images. The collage principle seems to bespeak a particular legibility that is now lost, unless we are prepared to say that strictly speaking, they mean nothing, and are exercises in the 'ontology of the surface' (cf. Sarduy 2010; see Chapter 5 for more details).

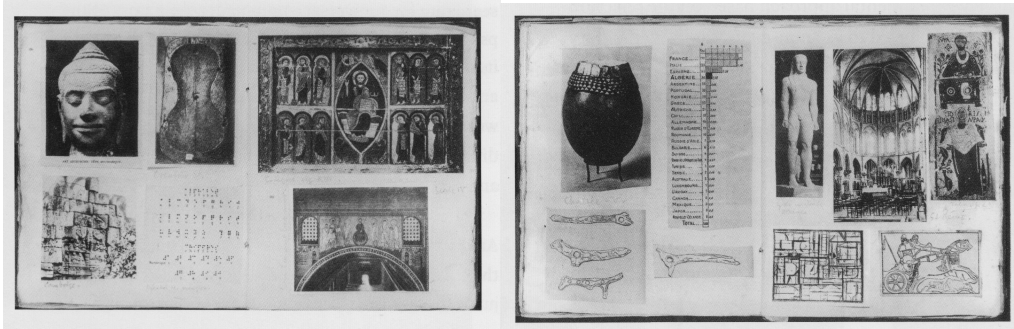


Figure 8.6 “Four Pages of ‘Structures,’ a notebook containing Torres-García’s art and architecture collages of the art of ancient civilizations, Paris, 1932. Museo Torres-García, Montevideo. Photos by Alfredo Testoni” (Ramírez and Olea 2004, 74). [Ramírez and Olea, eds., 2004, 75].

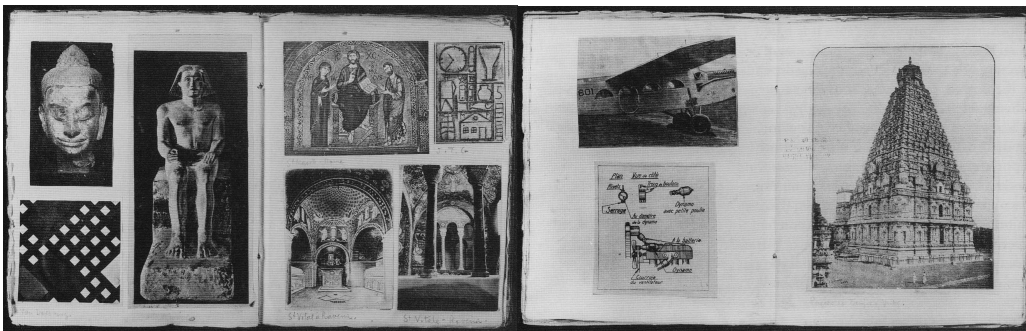


Figure 8.7 “Four pages from Joaquín Torres-García’s scrapbook, *Structures*, 1930, done while in Paris. Photo: Alfredo Testoni” (Ramírez 1992, 122). [Ramírez, ed., 1992, 122].

From the grid/wall, we return to its decorative surface: Varejão’s *azulejo* tiles and her gridding of walls through ornamentation, with histories of coloniality. Her recent *Sauna* series (2004 – present) is an exploration of perspective, and just as the baroque and mannerist traditions knew, not only can perspective be employed as a centring device, it can equally effect disorientation, and the ‘Baroque reason’ of vertigo, displacement, and the vicissitudes of the body. In *Swimming Pool* (Figure 8.9), the strictness of the classical line is subjected to the liquid, infinite folding of the baroque curve.



Figure 8.8 Adriana Varejão, *Swimming Pool*. Oil on canvas. 110 x 140 cm. [Diegues and Sardenberg, eds., 2009, 306].

A final image that condenses this study, while simultaneously opening it wide open again through the anarchy of visual associations it sets in motion: *Contingent*.³⁷¹ The photo invokes, never to illustrate, the risk of the hand, the contingency of history, photography and reproducibility, Torres-García's *Inverted Map* with coloniality's equator inscribed on the palm of the hand, a cartographic crossing (out) of the cosmological paths of a future and past, this hand that is both North and South, intertwining word and image, the glottograph 'EQUADOR' over a bright green wall, a Brazilian forest, an ocean, allowing me to write, stopping short the anarchy of free-constrained associations,

This is where I draw the line.

³⁷¹ The work for the future is to articulate the relation of constructive universalism and antropofagia to surrealism. The latter only obliquely appears in the whole of this study, and as such constitutes its blind spot. However, it would require another book-length study to explore the constellation of surrealism, antropofagia and constructive universalism.

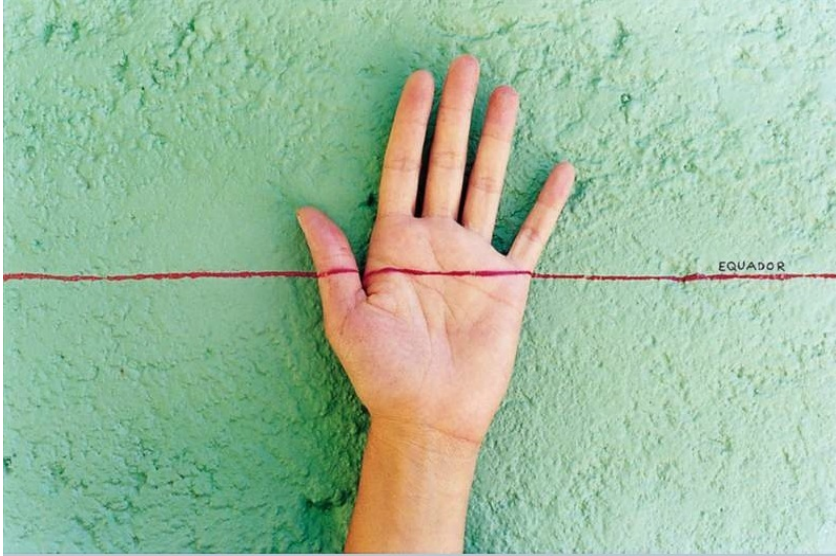


Figure 8.9 Adriana Varejão, *Contingent*, 2000. Photograph, 28 x 40.5 cm. (Edition of 100). [Diegues and Sardenberg 2009, 163].

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